

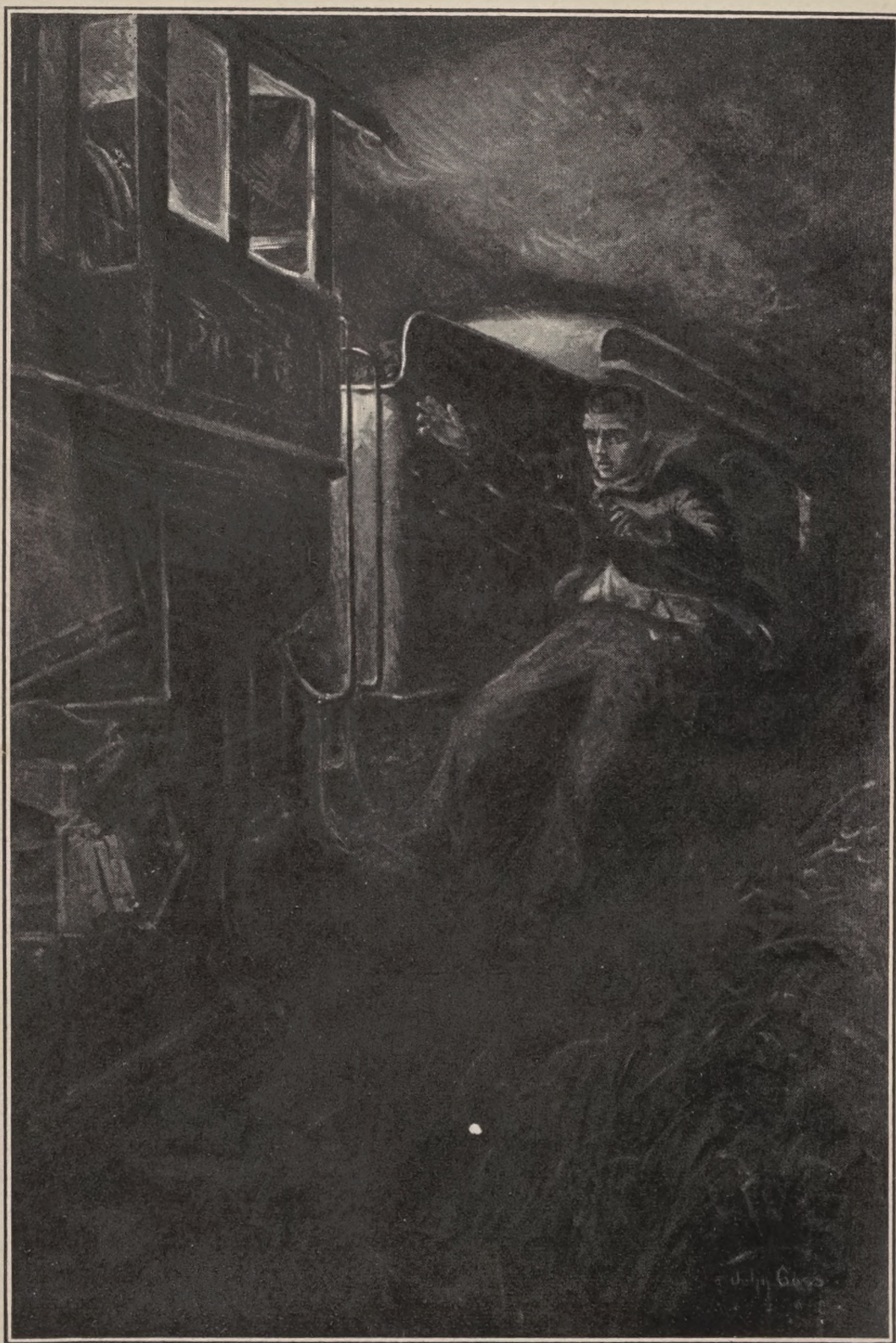


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“LEAPED OUT INTO THE DARKNESS.”
(See page 64.)

THE YOUNG TRAIN MASTER

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Young Section-Hand," "The
Young Train Dispatcher," "The Quest
for the Rose of Sharon," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
HENRY GOSS

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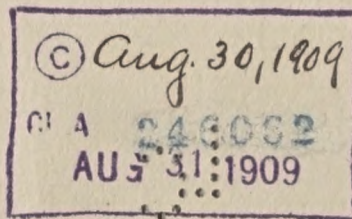
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Rev. Mr. Magraw

TO
The "Reddy Magraw"
WHOM I KNEW

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THE YOUNG TRAIN MASTER

CHAPTER I

OLD FRIENDS

NESTLING among the hills of the Scioto valley, in the south-central portion of the state of Ohio, lies the little town of Wadsworth. Venerable in its age, proud of its history, the first capital of its state and the home of men famous in their time, it lives in the past rather than in the present, and life there moves in a quiet and dignified manner, conducive to peace but not to progress.

Its streets, shaded by the elms planted by the pioneers, show traces of those early days; one of the old inns, with its swinging sign still stands; no roar of traffic disturbs its Sabbath stillness. Just to the east of it rises Mount Logan, named for the Indian chieftain known to every school-boy, and there is a legend that, standing on the summit of that hill, the day before his death, he

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cast a spell over the surrounding country, in order that the peace of his grave might never be disturbed. However that may be, certain it is that a dreamy influence pervades the atmosphere and gives to the town an air of leisure and calm deliberateness which nothing can dispel.

It had been founded more than a century before, when the country for a hundred miles around was an unbroken forest, by a little band of pioneers who, acquiring title to unnumbered acres by virtue of their service in the Revolution, pushed their way over the mountains from Virginia. Some of them brought their slaves with them, only to free them when they reached their new home. Other families from Virginia joined the little settlement and lent their hands to the battle with the wilderness. That southern flavour had never been lost, nor the southern deliberateness and dislike of innovation, nor the southern preference for agriculture rather than for manufacture.

By mere chance of geographical position, Wadsworth lies half way between Parkersburg, a hundred miles away to the east, and Cincinnati, a hundred miles away to the south-west; so, when the great P. & O. railway, looking for new fields to conquer, purchased the local line which connected those two cities, and which was fast degenerating into a "streak of rust," it saw that Wadsworth must be the centre of the new division, since it was the most economical place from which to handle

OLD FRIENDS

the business of the division and at which to maintain the division shops. All this, however, it carefully concealed from public view, but, expressing a supreme indifference as to whether the shops were placed at Wadsworth or somewhere else, offered to bring them there for a bonus of a hundred thousand dollars. After long delay and hesitation, the town was bonded for that amount, and the shops were formally established at the spot where they must, of necessity, have been placed.

Here also were the division offices, from which the business of the division was handled. They were upon the second floor of the dingy depot building which has been described more particularly in "The Young Train Dispatcher," and need not be dwelt upon here, except to observe that the passing years had added to its dinginess and disreputable appearance.

From these offices there descended, one bright October evening, lunch-basket in hand, a young man, who, springing lightly across the branching tracks of the yards, reached the street beyond and turned eastward along it. It was noticeable that he seemed to know everyone employed around the yards and that they seemed to know him, and greeted him with a cordiality evidently genuine.

Ten minutes' walk brought him to a trim cottage standing back from the street, amid a bower of vines. Its grounds were ample, and well-kept.

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At one side was a little orchard, whose trees showed the glint of ripening fruit. Farther back, near the barn, a cow was grazing, and the busy clatter of chickens came from an enclosure to the right. The place somehow gave the impression that those who lived within were happy and contented people; not rich, but able, by the labour of their hands, to assure themselves a comfortable livelihood — which is, perhaps, the happiest condition vouchsafed to human beings.

Through the gate of this house the young man turned, and went slowly up the walk leading to the door. But as he stretched out his hand to turn the knob, the door flew open and a girl of about sixteen fairly flung herself into his arms.

“Why, Mamie!” he cried. “*Is it Mamie?*” and he held her off for a moment’s inspection. “When did you get back?”

“On Number Three,” she answered. “I had a notion to wait for you, and then I thought it would be nicer to come home and surprise you.”

The words “Number Three” stamped both speakers as of the railroad. For who but one raised in the atmosphere of the road would know that “Number Three” was the west-bound flier?

“See how brown I am,” she added, holding her face up for his inspection.

“Yes,” he agreed, looking down at her, “you are. Did you have a good time?”

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"Only so-so," she answered, smiling up at him. "I can have the best time of all right here at home."

"So can I," he agreed. "It's been a little lonesome with you away."

"Has it, Allan?" she asked, quickly, her eyes shining with the glint of sudden tears. "It's nice of you to say that."

"Well, it's true: and it won't hurt to say it, now you're back. But I didn't dare tell you when I wrote. I wanted you to enjoy your visit. I thought you were going to stay till Tuesday."

"Oh, I couldn't stay any longer than to-day!" she protested, quickly.

"Why not?" he asked, looking at her in surprise. "What's going to happen to-day?"

"Come in and you'll see," she answered, and led him triumphantly into the house.

Through the hall they went, into the dining-room beyond, where a bright-faced woman, just entering middle-age, was putting the finishing touches to a table immaculately spread.

"Oh, there ye are!" she cried, turning as they entered. "What kept you so long, Allan?"

"I've been out here gossiping with Mamie," he explained, laughing.

"I was afeerd the supper would git stale," she said. "I don't like to keep things warmed up; they ain't got the same taste they have when they're cooked jest right and served right away."

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"You needn't wait for me, if there's company," he said, seeing that an extra place had been laid.

"Oh, I reckon the company's willin' to wait," she retorted, with a laugh. "Only don't be no longer than ye kin help."

"I won't," Allan promised and hurried away.

Five minutes later, he opened the door of the dining-room again, and saw who the visitor was.

"Why, Reddy!" he cried, going quickly forward, his hand outstretched. "How are you? I'm glad to see you."

"The same here, Allan," answered Reddy Magraw, warmly gripping the hand outstretched to him in his own honest palm. "An' mighty glad I was when Jack asked me t' be here t'-day."

"To-day," echoed Allan, glancing quickly around at the smiling faces. "Why, what day is it?"

"Don't you know?" asked Jack, his face all one broad grin. "Don't you know, boy?"

Mamie's eyes were dancing, as she looked at Allan's perplexed countenance.

"Oh, it's a disgrace, Allan, if you don't remember!" she cried.

"I'll tell you what day it is, me boy," said Reddy, his face beaming. "It's jist eight year ago t'-day sence a little scalpeen named Allan West come along out there on Section Twenty-one an' asked the foreman, Jack Welsh, fer a job. We're

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meetin' here t'-night t' celebrate his good jedgment in givin' ye one."

"'Tis the thing in all my life I'm most proud of," said Jack.

"An' the thing that has made me happiest," added Mary.

"And I'd never have forgiven him, if he hadn't," cried Mamie, at which they all laughed, a little uncertainly, and sat down, their hearts very tender.

"Can it really be eight years?" asked Allan, after a moment's silence. "It doesn't seem possible. And yet when one thinks what has happened —"

"They has a lot happened," agreed Reddy. "An' many a happy day we had out there on Section Twinty-one. Not that I don't like the work now, Jack," he added. "But my gang don't seem t' be loike the old one. Mebbe it's because I'm gittin' old an' don't see things with quite so much gilt on 'em as I used to."

"Old! Nonsense!" cried Jack. "Why, you're a young man, yet, Reddy."

"No, I ain't," said Reddy. "I ain't young by no means. An' I've allers thought that that belt I got on the head from that runaway ingine had took some of the ginger out o' me. But that's all fancy, most likely," he added, hastily, seeing Allan's eyes upon him.

"Look here, Reddy," said Allan, "do you think

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my hitting you that time had anything to do with it?"

"No, I don't," said Reddy. "I think that was the only thing that saved me. I've told ye already that I wouldn't have complained if ye'd kilt me. Tell me about it ag'in, boy; I can't hear that story too often."

So Allan told again the story of that wild Christmas eve when, as track-walker, he had found a gang of wreckers tearing up the rails, and how the pay-car had been saved, and the lives of those in it.

"Oh, it must have been terrible!" cried Mamie, who had been listening with starting eyes, as though she had never before heard the story. "Think of creeping up alone on that gang of men! Weren't you awfully frightened, Allan?"

"No," answered Allan, smiling at her earnestness. "I didn't have time to get frightened, somehow. But," he added, laughing, "I don't mind confessing, now, that two or three days later, as I lay in bed thinking the whole thing over, I was scared nearly to death. It's a fact," he went on, seeing their puzzled countenances. "I just turned kind of faint thinking about it."

"An' no wonder," said Reddy. "'Twas enough t' make anybody turn faint. I remember jest sich another case. You knowed Tom Spurling, Jack?" he added, turning to Welsh.

"Yes," nodded Jack.

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“Well, then you’ll remember what a hot-headed feller he was — he had a head o’ red hair, by the way, purty nigh as red as mine. Well, one evenin’ he was hurryin’ acrost the yards t’ git his train — he was conductor on the west bound accommodation. He was carryin’ his cap an’ his dinner-bucket an’ his lantern an’ his little red tin dickey-box, an’ he was hittin’ it up lively, bein’ a minute or two late. It was a kind o’ foggy night, an’ jest as he got to the platform, Bill Johnson’s yard ingine come up behind an’ poked him in the legs with its footboard. Well, everybody expected t’ see Tom ground up in about two winks, but some way the ingine throwed him up on the platform, where he fell sprawlin’. Bill stopped the ingine an’ got down t’ see if Tom was hurted. Tom was settin’ up rubbin’ his head an’ glarin’ down at the lunch his missus had fixed up fer him an’ which was now scattered all over the platform and purty well mixed with cinders.

“‘Are ye hurted, Tom?’ asked Bill.

“‘Hurted!’ roared Tom. ‘No, o’ course not, ye blame fool! But look at them victuals!’

“‘Jumpin’ Jehosaphat!’ says Bill. ‘Ye ain’t worryin’ about them are ye?’

“‘Yes, I am!’ yells Tom, jumpin’ to his feet. ‘Why don’t ye look where ye’re goin’ with thet ole mud turtle o’ yourn? Fer jest about half a cent —’

“But some o’ the fellers got ’em apart, an’ Tom

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climbed on his train a minute later, still cussin' Bill fer the loss o' his lunch.

"Well, sir, he run his train down t' Cinci all right, an' next mornin' started back with her, an' they'd got as fer back as Midland City, when one o' the passengers come an' told the brakeman that the conductor was sick. An' mighty sick he was, layin' in a seat, white as a sheet, lookin' like his last hour had come.

" 'Fer Heaven's sake, Tom,' says the brakeman, 'what's the matter?'

" 'Oh, I was nearly kilt!' groans Tom, hoarse as a frog.

" 'Kilt!' says the brakeman. 'Where? Shall I holler fer a doctor? Mebbe they's one on board.'

" 'No,' says Tom. 'I ain't hurted.'

"The brakeman thought he'd gone crazy.

" 'What you talkin' about, anyhow?' he says.

" 'No,' goes on Tom, 'but it's God's providence I wasn't chewed into mincemeat.'

" 'When?' says the brakeman.

" 'Last night,' says Tom, 'by thet yard ingine at Wadsworth. It's jest come to me what a narrer escape I had.'

"Well, the brakeman told me, Tom was about the sickest man he ever seen fer an hour or more, an' then he peckered up a little, an' finally was all right ag'in."

"I can imagine just how he felt," said Allan, amid the laughter caused by Reddy's story. "I

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fancy it's a good deal like seasickness. It just swoops down on you and takes the nerve out of you and leaves you limp as a rag."

From one story, they passed to another — the wreck at Vinton, the fight at Coalville, Dan Nolan's death — stories which have already been told in the earlier books of this series, and which need not be repeated here.

"Did ye ever hear anything more o' that snake, Nevins, what I chased all over creation that night he tried t' wreck the president's special?" inquired Jack.

"Yes," Allan answered, "I heard about him just the other day. Mr. Schofield told me that he had seen him at Cincinnati — passed him on the street."

"What's he doin'?" asked Jack, quickly.

"I don't know. Earning an honest living, I hope. Mr. Schofield said he was well-dressed and seemed to be prosperous."

"Well, mebbe he is earnin' an honest livin', but I doubt it," said Jack. "I don't think he knows how. That reminds me. I heard this arternoon that Hayes is goin' to Springfield."

"Yes," said Allan. "He's to be train master on the Illinois division."

"Then that means that they'll be a chief-dispatcher to appoint here. Who'll get it? Goodwood?"

"Yes; he's next in line."

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"An' that'll make you senior dispatcher?"

"Yes."

"When I think," said Jack, "that eight year ago, this here felly was a kid lookin' fer a job an' that now he's senior dispatcher, with a mighty good chance o' bein' superintindent some day, I begin t' believe that a felly has a fair chance in this country, arter all. You know they's allers sayin' we're all ground down by wealth; but I've noticed that the fellies who's ground down are them that spends most o' their time in some bar-room hollerin' about it."

"That's true," Allan agreed. "And don't forget that you've gone up from section foreman to division roadmaster in the same time, and that you're not done yet."

"Yes, I am, me boy," said Jack, gravely. "I haven't got th' eddication t' go any further. I've got the experience, but that's only half the equipment a felly has to have to reach the top. I don't know jest how it is, but eddication — the real thing — seems t' kind o' give a man a bigger grasp of things. He kin put two and two together quicker — he kin see further."

"Jack's right," said Reddy. "Now I've reached my limit in section foreman. It's as fur as I kin go. I ain't complainin'. I'm contented. But some of us is built fer speed, an' some of us is built fer strength. Some of us has to pull freight, and some

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gits to pull polished Pullmans, but I reckon it all comes to th' same thing in the end."

"Yes," said Allan, quietly, "passenger and freight all have the same destination. And you know, as well as I do, that it's the freight that counts most when it comes to figuring results."

The ringing of the telephone bell interrupted them, and Mamie ran to answer it. She was back in a moment.

"Somebody wants you, Allan," she said. "Mr. Schofield, I think."

Anxious eyes followed him, as he arose and went to the 'phone. A call from the superintendent might mean so many things—usually did mean disaster of some kind. He was gone a long time, and as the minutes lengthened, the shadow on the faces of those about the table deepened. They tried at first to keep up a semblance of conversation, but that finally dropped away and they sat silent. That it was something serious was evident.

But Allan came back at last, and as he caught sight of their anxious faces, he laughed outright.

"No, it's not a wreck," he said, "and I'm not fired."

He sat down, and the others waited. If it was anything he could tell them, they knew he would. If it was official business, they did not wish to question him.

"The fact is," he went on, slowly, watching

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Mamie's face with evident amusement, "a very unusual thing has happened."

"Oh, Allan!" Mamie burst out, "if you're going to tell us, please hurry and do it."

"A very unusual thing," Allan proceeded with provoking deliberation. "You know I told you that Mr. Hayes is going to Springfield."

"Yes," said Mamie, encouragingly, bouncing in her seat.

"Ain't he goin'?" asked Jack.

"Oh, yes; he's going. He went this afternoon. But the fact is, Goodwood don't want his job."

"Why?"

"He says the hours are too long, and the added responsibility more than the added salary. He says he's contented where he is."

"Ho!" said Reddy. "Reached his limit jest like me, an' knows it. Well, it's a wise man that knows when to let well enough alone."

But Mamie's face suddenly gleamed with understanding, and she jumped from her seat and rushed around the table to Allan's side.

"I know!" she cried. "I know! Oh, you stupid people! Don't you see? Allan's to be chief-dispatcher!"

They were all on their feet now.

"What, Allan! Is it?" cried Jack, incoherently.

"Yes," answered Allan, "I guess it is."

Jack came over to him and put his hands on his shoulders.

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“Eight year ago to-day,” he said, looking him in the eyes. “I’m proud of ye, me boy. But I don’t need t’ tell ye that.”

“And he’ll make the best chief this division ever had,” added Reddy with conviction. “Where’s my hat?”

“But you ain’t goin’!” protested Mrs. Welsh. “It’s early yet.”

“I know it is,” said Reddy. “But I can’t stay. Not with this news in my craw. I must tell the old woman and the boys. They ain’t a man on the division that won’t be glad.”

CHAPTER II

NEW DUTIES

Two days later, Allan West entered regularly upon his new duties as chief-dispatcher of the Ohio Division of the P. & O. railway. Meantime, news of his promotion had got about, and it seemed as though every employee of the division, high or low, had made it a point to seek him out and congratulate him. For Allan, in the eight years he had been with the road, had endeared himself to everyone by kindness and considerateness, and even those engineers and conductors who had a standing grievance against all dispatchers had come to confess that he was the squarest one they had ever met.

The chief-dispatcher's office is a large and pleasant room, looking down over the busy yards, and is shared by Mr. Plumfield, the train master. A great desk stands between the front windows, one side of which belongs to the train master and the other to the chief-dispatcher. On it two sounders clicked, and from the open door of the dispatchers' office, at Allan's back, came the incessant clamouring of other instruments.

To one unaccustomed to it, this ceaseless noise

NEW DUTIES

would have been perfectly distracting, but to the habitués of the offices it was scarcely noticeable. And yet, though they seemingly paid no heed to it, it had a meaning for them, and anything out of routine attracted their attention instantly. For telegraphers develop a sixth sense, which takes up and translates what the instruments are saying without interfering with any of the others.

Perhaps you have seen an engineer sitting beside his engine, reading a paper while the complicated mechanism whirls smoothly along at its appointed task. Suddenly, without cause so far as you can see, he starts up, snatches up an oil can or a wrench, and squirts a jet of oil upon a bearing or tightens a nut somewhere. No sign of trouble has been audible to you, but his trained ear, even though his brain was otherwise engaged, had caught an unaccustomed burr or rattle and had called his attention to it.

Such instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Everyone who works at a certain task, or goes through a certain set of motions, becomes, after a time, to some extent automatic. Physiologists call such motions "reflex," and tell us that in time the brain passes on such volitions to the spinal cord and so frees itself for other work—one of the wise provisions of our bodily mechanism, whose wonder and perfection very few of us understand or appreciate.

Allan was, of course, acquainted, in a general

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way, with the duties of his new position, and he lost no time in further familiarizing himself with them. All of the operators along the line were under his control. He assigned them to their duties, promoted them or discharged them as occasion might arise, investigated any delinquency on their part, and held them accountable for the proper performance of their duties. In addition to this, he was required to see that empty freight cars were furnished the various agents along the line, as they needed them, and that loaded cars were taken up promptly and sent forward to their destinations. Every day, each agent wired in his car requirements, and it was the chief-dispatcher's business to see that these requirements were filled as speedily as possible. He was also expected to see that the dispatchers understood their duties, and to unravel any knotty point which any of them might not understand.

Further than that, the clerical duties of the position were very heavy. He must make daily reports of the amount of freight handled; and if any freight crew was kept on the road more than sixteen hours, a special report must be prepared for the Interstate Commerce Commission, giving the facts in the case, and explaining why the crew had been kept out so long; for it is unlawful to keep any crew on duty for more than that length of time. A wise provision, for before this law was enacted, in busy seasons, railroads sometimes kept

NEW DUTIES

their crews on duty for twenty-four, thirty-six and even forty-eight hours at a stretch — an abuse which inevitably resulted in accidents from the men going to sleep while on duty, or being so exhausted by the long hours as to grow careless and forgetful of orders.

These were the duties when everything was moving in regular order. At other times, the supreme duty of every one connected with the office was to get them back to regular order. For a great railroad system is like a complicated machine — no part can run smoothly unless all are running smoothly, and the throwing of the smallest cog out of gear cripples the entire mechanism. Although the train master was the “trouble man,” — in other words, the man whose especial duty it was to superintend the clearing away of wrecks, and the straightening out of traffic — whenever anything happened to interfere with it, all other work became subordinate to that of restoring traffic to its normal condition.

On this morning, however, everything was moving in regular order; the sounders clicked out the reports of trains on time; there were no calls for cars which could not be answered promptly and no freight along the line which the regular locals could not handle. Conductors came and registered, compared their watches with the big electric clock which kept official time for the division, and departed;

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others reported in; trainmen loitered before the bulletin board, or gossiped in their lounging-room across the hall; the typewriting machine of the train master's stenographer clicked steadily away; and there was about the place a contented hum of industry, such as one hears about a bee-hive on a warm day in late spring when the apples are in bloom.

"I heard some bad news about Heywood, while I was in Cincinnati yesterday," remarked Mr. Plumfield casually, in the course of the morning, referring to the general superintendent.

"Bad news?" questioned Allan, looking up quickly.

"I don't believe he's making good. Nothing definite, you know; just a general feeling of dissatisfaction with him. I shouldn't be surprised if he lost out."

"What's the matter with him?"

"You knew his wife died?"

"Yes."

"She was a mighty sweet woman, and I imagine had lots of influence on Heywood. Well, after her death, he seemed to go to pieces more or less. His daughter, Betty, was away at school, or somewhere, and didn't know until she came home. You knew her?"

"Oh, yes; very well. I used to see her when they lived here."

"Yes; I rather fancied, sometimes —"

NEW DUTIES

"I thought a great deal of her and still do," Allan interrupted.

Mr. Plumfield nodded.

"Well, she came home and tried to brace him up, and I dare say succeeded pretty well for a while —"

He stopped. There was no need that he should say anything more.

Allan, staring at the report before him, remembered how kind Mr. Heywood had been to him years before; remembered his first vision of Betty Heywood, as she came bursting into her father's office, one day when he was there. He had not seen her for nearly four years — not since the night when she had ridden away on the east-bound flyer to go to school in the East. Had she changed, he wondered, or was she still the same warm-hearted, impulsive girl whom he had known?

The sounder on Allan's desk began to call him, and he came back to the present with a start. He opened the key and replied with the quick . . . , . . . , which told that he was ready to receive the message.

"Chief dispatcher, Ohio Division," clicked out the little instrument. "A special train consisting of combination coach and private car will leave Cincinnati eastbound about ten o'clock to-morrow morning. You will have your best engines ready to take it through to Wadsworth, and from there

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to Parkersburg. This special is to run without orders, its time to be governed only by the maximum speed of the engine, and is to be given a clear track with rights over everything. It must be expedited in every way possible. A. G. ROUND,

"General Manager."

Mr. Plumfield whistled softly, as the message ended.

"Who do you suppose it is?" he asked. "The Emperor of Germany?"

"That's certainly an unusual order," agreed Allan.

"I never saw but one like it before," added Mr. Plumfield. "That was when the president of the road was somewhere in the west, and his wife was reported dying back at Baltimore. We gave him right of way then."

"Did he get there in time?" asked Allan.

"Oh, she didn't die. Maybe it was his presence saved her. Anyway, his train covered the two hundred miles from Cincinnati to Parkersburg at an average speed of fifty-three miles an hour. That was going some."

"We'll see if we can beat it to-morrow," Allan answered, and turned to the task of clearing the track for the special.

As he knew only the approximate time that the special would leave Cincinnati, it was necessary to prepare several plans, the one to be adopted depend-

NEW DUTIES

ing upon the exact time the train pulled out from the Grand Central depot. From Cincinnati to Loveland he had a double track to work with, but from Loveland east, only a single track, and it was necessary to so arrange the schedule that no train would interfere with the special and at the same time to provide that they be interfered with as little as possible. Another difficulty arose from the fact that it was impossible to tell exactly how fast the special would run, and Allan's brow wrinkled perplexedly as he bent above the time-card.

"I tell you what I'm going to do," he said, at last, "I'm going over the road with this train myself. I'm not going to take any chances."

And that night, with the time-card in his pocket and his plans carefully laid, Allan boarded the accommodation for Cincinnati.

The man in whose behalf this extraordinary order had been issued was no less a personage than a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. His election had been thought fairly certain, but hinged upon New York State. This, he had been confidently assured by the party leaders, he would carry without difficulty; and he had not visited it except early in the campaign, for a few speeches. He had then devoted his attention to some doubtful states in the middle west, when, with the election only ten days off, he had received a message urging him to reach New York at the earliest pos-

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sible moment, that unexpected opposition had developed there, and that every moment was precious. In this strait, he had appealed to the railroads, and they had leaped to his aid.

Not because of the man, nor because of the fact that he was a candidate for the greatest office within the gift of the people of this republic; but because they regarded his election as vital to their welfare. For the railroads had fallen among troublous times. The business regeneration of the past few years had affected them deeply. Whether rightly or wrongly, the American public, or a large portion of it, had come to believe that railroad management was corrupt and wasteful, that it discriminated against its patrons and used its wealth and influence to secure the passage of laws inimicable to public welfare. So severe measures had been taken to curtail this power, and to protect the interests of both the stockholders of the roads and of the people who gave them business. The issuing of passes had been forbidden; a commission had been established by the government to prevent and punish any discrimination in favour of any shipper of freight; laws had been passed curtailing the hours of railway employees; in many states the legal fare to be charged passengers had been reduced by act of legislature from three to two cents a mile, and there had sprung up a wide-spread demand that freight rates be also regulated by law. Many roads felt that ruin was staring them in the

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face, and an all-important question with them was the election of a president who would regard them with friendly eyes and who would throw his influence against any revolutionary measures which might be aimed at them.

It was not wonderful, then, that they should have rushed to the assistance of this man, since his opponent was pledged to work for the very measures which the roads dreaded; and that, when his election seemed in danger, they should have placed their resources absolutely at his disposal, and have given him right of way over everything. He had been hurried across the plains of Missouri, shot into Saint Louis, flung across the prairies of Illinois and Indiana, and now, at 9.45 o'clock in the morning, the train shot into the Grand Union station at Cincinnati, and came to a stop with a jerk.

Ten minutes before, Allan, able at last to time the exact minute of its arrival, had sent out the messages which would govern its movements from Cincinnati to Wadsworth. There were to be no stops, except one for water, and, if all went well, he was determined to cover the hundred miles in a hundred minutes. He knew his engine and knew the engineer — 957, with Tom Michaels, lean, gray-haired, a bundle of nerves, a man to take chances if necessary, yet never to take one that was unnecessary; and he believed that the distance could be covered in that time.

Three minutes were allowed in which to change

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engines, and half a dozen men were waiting to make the change. The air-hose was uncoupled and the old engine backed away. While the 957 was run down and coupled up, four men with flaring torches had been making an examination of the coach and private car, and in just three minutes, or at 9.48 A. M., the conductor held up his hand and Michaels gently opened the throttle.

The old engineer's face was gleaming. It was the first time in his long life at the throttle that he had ever been given a free track and told to go ahead. But he nursed her carefully over the network of tracks in the yards, out through the ditch and past the stock-yards before he really let her out. Then, slowly and slowly, he drew the throttle open, and with every instant the great engine gathered speed, while the fireman, equally interested and enthusiastic, nursed the fire until the fire-box was a pit of white-hot, swirling flame.

Allan had ensconced himself on the forward end of the fireman's seat, and sat for a time, watch in hand. Then he looked over at Michaels and nodded. They were making their mile a minute.

"It's like ridin' on a shootin' star," the fireman shouted up, as he rested for a moment from his exertions, bracing himself, his feet wide apart, against the swaying of the engine. "Right through the middle of a white-hot comet," he added, scraping the sweat from his forehead. "It surely is a hot day."

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Then he bent again to his task. Every thirty-five seconds he threw three scoops-full of coal into the fire-box, then closed the door for the same length of time. And always he kept his eye on the indicator, to see that the pressure never fell below the "popping-off" point. It may be that, for this occasion, Michaels had hung a little extra weight on the lever of his safety-valve. At any rate, no steam was wasted through it.

There was a block system as far as Loveland, but beyond that, they had to trust to the observance of orders issued from division headquarters. On and on sped the train, the speed creeping up to sixty-five miles an hour, and once to seventy-four on a long down-grade. The whistle seemed to shriek its warning almost continuously; stations seemed to crumble to pieces with a crash as the train leaped past them; farm houses fluttered by or wheeled in stately procession across the landscape. And always Michaels sat, his hand on the throttle, his eyes on the track ahead, swaying to the motion of the engine, as a rider sways to his steed; only moving from time to time to glance at his watch or at the steam and water gauge, to blow the whistle and open the injector which shot the water from the tank to the boiler of the engine. The track ahead seemed to be rushing toward them only to be swallowed up; the nearer landscape was merely a gray blur; the telegraph poles flashed by "like the teeth of a fine-tooth comb," as the fire-

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man remarked; and always there was the roar of the great machine, the crash and rumble as the engine hurled itself along the rails. It was a marvel that it kept them, or seemed so — a marvel that it did not hurtle away cross-country at its own sweet will.

At New Vienna they paused for water. Michaels, with the skill of a magician, brought his engine to a stop with the tank-opening exactly underneath the penstock beside the track. The fireman lowered it with a clang and the water rushed and foamed down into the almost empty tank. Then, as the penstock swung up into place, Michaels opened the throttle and they were off again.

Allan, glancing across at the engineer, saw how the sweat was pouring down his face; how his face had aged and lined under the strain; how the lips had tightened. It was a hot day, unusually hot for so late in the year, and the atmosphere was close with threatened storm — but it was not the heat alone which brought out the sweat upon the engineer, nor the discomfort which lined and aged his face. Yet he sat erect as ever, his eyes glancing from the track ahead to the gauges, and back again. Once he stooped from his seat to shout a warning word to the fireman, when the needle for an instant dropped a notch. Allan, glancing back, saw that the rear car was lost in a whirl of dust. It seemed as insignificant as a tail — a mere appendage to be whipped hither and thither as the engine willed.

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He had ridden in cabs before — many times — but never under such conditions as these. He knew the track — he knew the rattle of every target as they flashed past it, the roar of every bridge as they rushed through it; and suddenly he remembered the sharp curve just beyond Greenfield, and wondered if Michaels would slow up for it.

The huddle of roofs that marked the town flashed into sight ahead, grew and grew, was upon them. The rattle of switches told that they were in the yards, but yard-limit speed had no bearing upon this case. He caught a glimpse of the signal before the station, and saw with relief that it was set at safety. Everything was working well, then, as he had planned it. Twenty miles more and they would be at Wadsworth, with the first leg of the journey covered. There was no need that he should go further with the train — he had tested its capabilities — he would know how to provide for it. Then the curve was upon them, and he braced himself for the jar he knew must come as the engine struck it. Michaels, his face drawn and tense, sat staring ahead, but made no move toward closing the throttle, even a hair's-breadth.

There was a mighty jolt, and the engine seemed to climb over the rails. Allan could feel it lift perceptibly, but the wheels held. A moment more —

And then, as they cleared the curve and caught a glimpse of the straight track beyond, he saw

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steaming toward them, under full headway, not a hundred yards away, another engine. Only for an instant he saw it; then, as Michaels closed the throttle and jerked on the brakes, he closed his eyes involuntarily, for he knew that no power on earth could stop the train in time.

CHAPTER III

THE MIRACLE AT GREENFIELD

MEANWHILE, back in his private car, the great man, as was his custom in any circumstance, had made himself as comfortable as might be. It was a luxurious car, eighty feet in length, with bath, kitchen, lounging room, bed rooms, dining room — in fact, everything that a modern home could have, on a small and compact scale. Travel in this car was as luxurious as travel could be. And even at the wild rate of speed at which it was jerked forward, it maintained a long, steady roll, much like that of a ship on a calm sea. Only when one glanced out the windows at the blurred landscape was the speed apparent, unless, indeed, one kept one's eyes on the needle, which flickered ceaselessly up and down on the speed-indicator.

Both of these things the great man studiously refrained from doing, but turning his back alike to the windows and to the indicator, he devoted his time to going through his correspondence, dictating to his secretary, and meditating ways and means for holding New York in the column of the "safe and sane."

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He sat up late into the night, as the train whirled across the Illinois prairies, smoking meditatively, a wrinkle of perplexed anxiety between his brows, for the path to the White House was proving more thorny than he had thought possible. Not the least of his unexpected tribulations was this record-breaking trip half across the continent. He was naturally a nervous man, and this hurtling through space distressed him acutely. He felt that he was being offered as a sacrifice upon the altar of his country, and the sensation was anything but pleasant. His only consolation was that his meteoric trip was being featured by the papers, both friendly and unfriendly, and would prove an excellent advertisement — more especially since the friendly papers were taking care to point out how lightly the great man considered his own comfort — nay, even his life — when his country called him! He smiled grimly to himself as he thought of those headlines, for he was thoroughly conscious that he was not in the least heroic, but merely an ordinary man with a faculty of making friends, a power of keeping his mouth shut when it was wise to do so, and a gift for rounded periods when rounded periods were demanded.

He went to bed, at last, long after midnight, and it was not until Cincinnati had been left far behind that he arose. He took his bath, dressed himself leisurely, and finally sat down to breakfast. Sitting thus, with his side to the window, he could

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not escape the vision of the landscape, which was rushing madly past. Involuntarily his eyes rested for an instant on the speed-indicator, and he started as he saw that the needle showed an hourly speed of seventy-two miles. He closed his lips firmly together and with a hand not altogether steady started to attack his grapefruit.

Then suddenly the car lurched heavily and the next instant it seemed to stand on end and buckle in the middle. The great man was thrown forward across the table, which overturned with a crash; a negro waiter, who was just entering with a tray of dishes, was hurled through a glass partition and disappeared with a yell of terror. Every movable thing in the car leaped toward the front end; what was breakable broke and the orderly interior was transformed in an instant to an appalling chaos.

Of what happened in the next minute or two, the great man never had any very definite recollection. He staggered to his feet at last and looked dazedly around. Had there been a wreck? Was he badly injured?

Then he realized that the car was moving, that the landscape was slipping past as rapidly as ever. His eyes fell again upon the needle of the indicator. It stood at sixty-eight. He glared at it for a moment, unable to believe his senses, then collapsed into a chair and buried his head in his hands.

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And it was in that position that his secretary found him.

Bill Higgins, the engineer, always claimed it was because the agent at Roxabel had held him up for an hour waiting for a box-car to be loaded. The car was for a friend of the agent's, Bill explained, or he never would have held the train. It wasn't perishable goods, either — just some household stuff, which the friend was having moved in from Roxabel to Loveland.

Jim Burns, the conductor, said it was the heat — a really remarkable and enervating heat for October, presaging a great storm brewing somewhere. What the fireman said and the brakemen is immaterial, because when their superiors went to sleep, it was to be expected that they would do likewise. All of which came out when Train Master Plumfield had them "on the carpet" for the investigation which followed. What happened was really this:

Local freight west had started out from Wadsworth early in the morning, to make the trip in to Cincinnati, picking up such cars as were waiting for it along the way, and delivering others to the several stations. The day was hot — there was no question of that — and the work was heavy, for there was an unusual number of cars to deliver and pick up. Besides which, came the delay at Roxabel, where the agent *did* hold the train for

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a while, until the work of loading a car could be finished. The agent swore, however, that the delay on this account did not amount to more than fifteen minutes. At Lyndon, came an order for the freight to proceed to the gravel-pit siding east of Greenfield, and run in there and await the passage of a special.

"Don't say how long we'll have to wait," said Burns, as he and the engineer compared notes. "Jest wait — time ain't no object to nobody. We'll be mighty lucky if we get into Cincinnati before midnight."

"Them dispatchers don't know their business, an' never did!" protested Higgins, wiping the perspiration from his red face. "It's an outrage to keep a train on the road the way they're keepin' us. The government ort t' hear about it."

"It sure ort," agreed the conductor. "Well, I guess we're ready," and as the train rattled slowly out of the siding, he swung himself aboard the caboose, looked back to see that a yard-man closed the switch, and then, having made up his report as far as he could, calmly laid himself down in a berth and went to sleep.

The train rumbled on under the hot sun. The engineer, looking ahead, could see the waves of heat rising from the rails and the pitch oozing from the ties. Beside him, the fire beneath the boiler spat and roared; the sun beat down upon the great locomotive, until Higgins almost fancied it was

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turning red-hot before his eyes. The fireman, stripped to the waist, swung the fire-box door open and shut as he ladled in the coal, stopping now and then to dash the sweat from before his eyes or to spray himself with water from the tank. For they were travelling with the wind, not against it, and so lost the effect of any cooling breeze.

"Blamed if you'd think she'd need so much coal," remarked the front brakeman, who was riding in the cab. "You'd think this heat would purty nigh git up steam without any help."

"You don't know this blamed old hog," said the fireman, referring to the engine. "She eats up coal like a trans-Atlantic liner. I've thought sometimes they wasn't no front end to her fire-box, an' that I was jest shovellin' coal out into creation. She's a caution, she is!"

"Oh, she ain't so bad," put in Higgins, who like all engineers, loved his engine in spite of her faults. "You're jest a-talkin', Pinkey."

"Huh!" grunted Pinkey. "You trade jobs with me awhile an' see."

But to this absurd proposal the engineer returned no answer. Instead, he tooted the whistle for a crossing, and, his hand on the throttle, watched a nervous farmer whip a team of horses across the track.

"Blamed fool!" he muttered. "Couldn't wait till we got past! Well, there's the sidin'," he added, and stopped until the brakeman had run

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ahead and thrown the switch. Then he ran slowly in.

The brakeman closed the switch, and swung himself up into the caboose. He found the conductor and rear brakemen peacefully sleeping, and without disturbing them, clambered up into the cupola, intending to keep a lookout for the special, and open the switch after it had passed, so that the freight could pass out again upon the main track and proceed upon its way. For a few minutes, his eyes remained fixed upon the track ahead; then his lids gradually drooped, his head nodded, and finally fell forward upon his arms.

Forward in the engine, the engineer and fireman settled themselves upon their respective boxes.

"How long do we have t' wait?" inquired the latter, after a few moments.

"Blamed if I know," answered the engineer. "That fool dispatcher didn't say. But it can't be more'n ten minutes. If it had been, he'd have let us go on to Greenfield."

The minutes passed; and, finally, lulled by the quiet breathing of the engine, the purr of insects, and the distant rattle of a mowing machine, both engineer and fireman nodded off.

Twenty minutes later, the engineer awoke with a start, just in time, as he thought, to hear the roar of a train fade away in the distance. He glanced at his watch, then got down from his seat, and shook the fireman with no gentle hand.

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"Goin' t' stay here all day, Pinkey?" he asked. "An' what's the matter with them blame fools back there?" he added, savagely, and seizing the whistle cord, blew three shrill blasts. A moment later, the front brakeman, who had started awake at the first blast, came running forward over the train and clambered down into the cab.

"Why don't some o' you ijits open that there switch back there," demanded Higgins, "so's I kin back out? Or do you want t' stay here the rest o' your natural lives?"

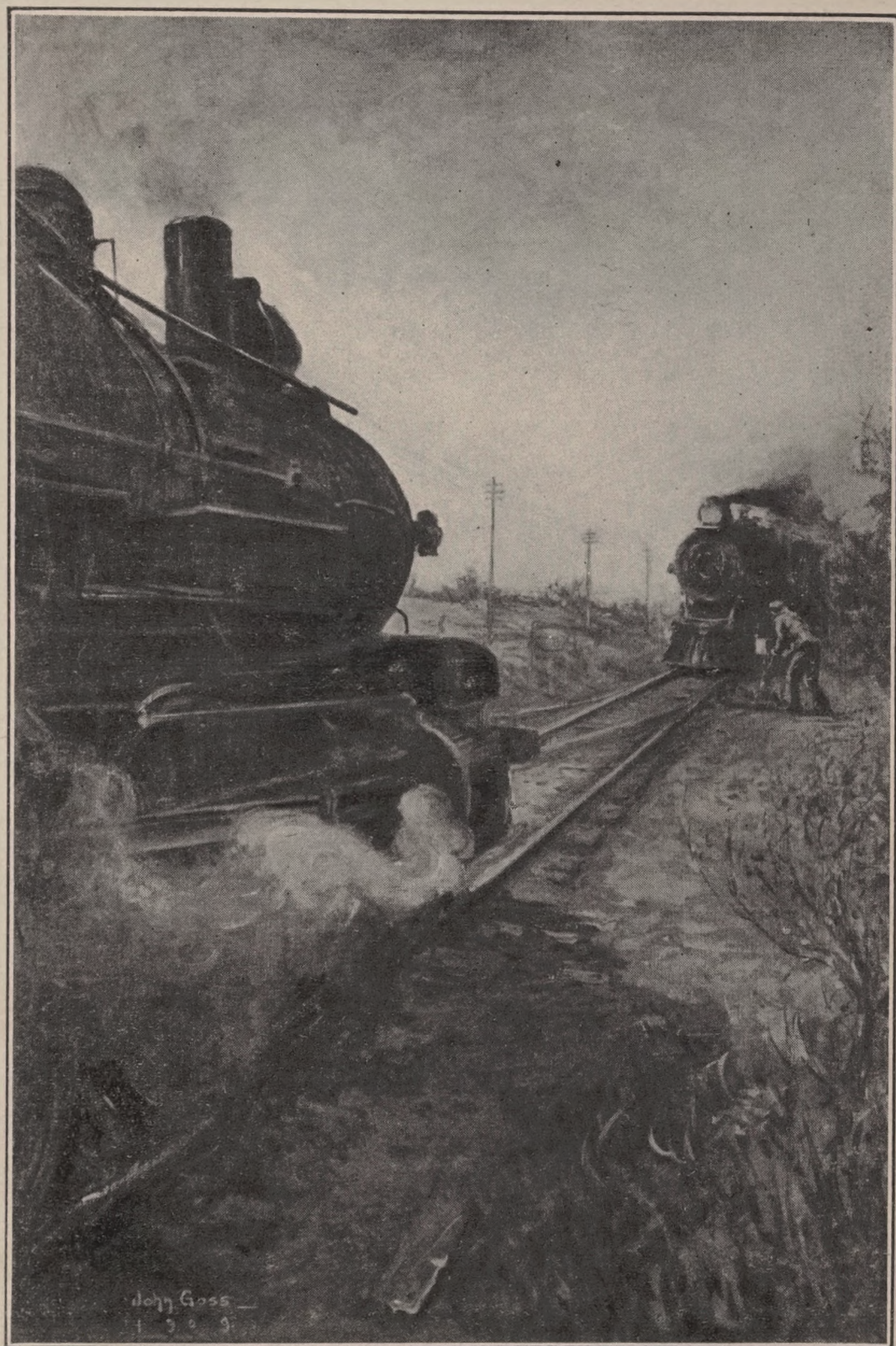
"Why don't you pull straight out?" asked the brakeman. "What's th' use o' backin' up?"

"Why, that there switch has been out o' fix fer three months," answered Higgins, savagely. "I've reported it a dozen times, but much good it does. Burns knows it. He knows we've got t' back out. Why don't he wake up? Is he deaf?" and he jerked the whistle fiercely again.

Conductor and brakeman in the caboose were having a discussion of much the same tenor. Then Burns remembered about the broken switch.

"We've got t' back out," he said. "Higgins's right. Git her open," and as the brakeman threw the switch, he signalled the engineer to back up.

The front brakeman, meanwhile, being of an inquiring disposition, had dropped off the engine and walked forward to the other switch, to see just what the matter was with it. To his surprise, he found it in perfect working order, for the section



“THE NEXT INSTANT IT FLASHED INTO VIEW AROUND
THE CURVE.”

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gang had repaired it the afternoon before. Chuckling to himself, he opened and closed it two or three times, thinking what a good joke he had on Burns and Higgins. Then, looking back, he saw that his train had passed out upon the main track and was steaming toward him.

He closed the switch and was just about to lock it, when he heard another sound that made his heart stand still — the roar of a train approaching from the west. The next instant it flashed into view around the curve, running, as the brakeman afterwards expressed it, about three hundred miles a minute.

Without conscious thought, but seizing the one chance in a thousand to avoid a terrible accident, he threw the switch open again and then sprang aside as the special swept in upon the siding. He heard the screaming of the brakes and saw the train fairly buckling upon itself in an almost human effort to stop. But stop it could not, and out upon the main track again it swept, through the switch at the farther end of the siding, which the brakeman there had sense enough to open, and on toward Wadsworth.

Staring after it, they saw it pick up speed again, and disappear.

And it was a mighty solemn train crew that took that local freight in to Greenfield.

CHAPTER IV

AFTERMATH

SHOULD Allan West live for a hundred years, he will never forget that instant in which he closed his eyes and braced himself for the terrific shock he knew must come. There was no time to think, no time even for the sensation of fear to make itself felt; only a sort of dim realization that the end was at hand.

Then he felt the engine give a mighty lurch, which almost tore it from the rails; a roar sounded in his ears, there was another lurch, and opening his eyes, at last, he saw only the straight track ahead of him, and felt the engine gradually gaining speed as Michaels released the brakes and slowly opened the throttle.

He sat erect with a gasp of amazement, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with shaking hand. He looked down at the fireman, who had phlegmatically resumed his duties; then over at the engineer, who was gazing straight ahead of him, his face set and gray.

"What happened?" he shouted, as the fireman closed the fire-box and stood resting for a moment.

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"Blamed if I know," the latter answered. "I was shovellin' in coal, when Bill clapped on the brakes and purty nigh throwed me into the fire-box. Then we passed a freight an' Bill let her out again. He must 'a' thought she was on the same track."

"She *was* on the same track," said Allan.

"Well, we passed her, anyway," retorted the fireman, philosophically, and returned to his duties.

Then Allan remembered the switch and understood dimly what had happened. But it was not until the investigation was held that he knew all the details.

The crew of the freight were, of course, hauled up "on the carpet." The two brakemen who had opened the switches at the proper instant and shunted the special past were commended for their prompt action, and exonerated from blame, as the train was, of course, in charge of the conductor and engineer. The two latter worthies were suspended indefinitely without pay.

It was by no means the first time in the history of the road that a freight crew had gone to sleep on a siding and waked up to find that they no longer knew what their rights were. The proper thing to have done, of course, was either to have flagged in to the next station, or to have hunted up the nearest telephone and found out from the dispatchers' office just what their rights were.

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"That front brakeman will make a good railroad man," remarked Mr. Plumfield, when the inquiry into the incident was over, taking a little red, leather-bound book from a drawer of his desk. "He's quick-witted — no man ever lasted very long with a railroad who wasn't."

He ran down the index at the front of the book, turned to the names of the four men who had just been on the carpet, and wrote a short sentence after each of them. That record would stand to commend or condemn them so long as they were connected with the road. The record of every man was there, with all his merits and demerits. Train masters might forget — might be promoted or discharged — but that record always remained.

"Yes," went on the train master, restoring the book to its drawer, "if a railroad man's wits aren't hung on hair-triggers and quicker than greased lightning in action, he's usually knocked into Kingdom Come before he has a chance to realize he never was cut out for the work."

And Mr. Plumfield was right. A railroad man must learn to act without stopping to think — he seldom has time to think. Perhaps if he had, he wouldn't be so ready to risk his life as he is — for he risks his life a thousand times to a soldier's once — but he always does it in a hurry. There is no long waiting under fire until the welcome order comes to charge — if there were, the railroad man would probably run away, and so would the

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soldier, but for the iron discipline that binds him. That's what discipline is for — to hold men firm in the face of realized and long-continued danger — for there is nothing on earth more difficult than to make men stand still and be shot at. The railroad man never has to stand still — he has to jump, and jump quick. All men aren't heroes, but their first impulse is usually to do the brave and necessary thing. Railroad men always act on that first impulse — and think about it and shiver over it and wonder at themselves afterwards.

Despite the misadventure, the special swept into Wadsworth on time, having covered ninety miles in ninety minutes — a record which has never been equalled, or even, for that matter, very nearly approached. For never since has a train been sent over the road under such orders.

A crowd had gathered at the Wadsworth station to receive the great man, confident that he would, at least, favour them with one of those scintillating three-minute talks for which he was so famous. So they gathered about the rear platform of his car yelling "Speech! speech!" For a time there was no response, then, finally, the door opened, but it was not the great man who appeared. It was his secretary, looking very white and shaky. He apologized for the great man in a thin and tremulous voice; the trip had been a very trying one, and the great man was suffering from the strain

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incident to the vigorous campaign he had been waging. He was lying down, endeavouring to get some much-needed rest, recognizing the necessity of saving himself for the final struggle which was to bring New York safe into line and assure an administration whose first effort it would be, etc., etc.

The crowd gave a few subdued cheers and melted away. Then the secretary leaped down the steps of the car and rushed up to Allan, who was watching the process of changing engines.

"Are you in charge here?" asked the secretary.

"I'm putting this special through, if that's what you mean," answered Allan.

"Well," said the secretary, "you're wanted in the private car at once."

"Very well," said Allan, and sprang up the steps behind him.

The great man was half-sitting, half-lying in a large chair. His face was gray and sunken and his eyes strangely bloodshot.

"This is the man in charge," said the secretary, bringing Allan to a halt before the chair.

"I just want to tell you one thing," said the great man, hoarsely, lifting a trembling finger, "and that is that if you're all crazy out here I'm not! The man who brought us over that last stretch of road ought to be in an asylum."

"We made the ninety miles in ninety minutes," said Allan, with some pride.

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"Well, I won't stand for anything more of that sort. Give me your word not to exceed fifty miles an hour at any time, or I'll get off the train."

"Very well, sir," answered Allan. "Will you put it in writing?"

"In writing? What for?"

"My orders are to push the engines for all they're worth."

The great man swore a mighty oath.

"Jim, give me a sheet of paper," he said to his secretary. And a moment later the order was written, in a sprawly scribble:

"October 15, 19—

"This special will hereafter at no time exceed a speed of fifty (50) miles per hour.

"Signed, _____"

And Allan still has that order, neatly framed, hanging over his desk.

He hurried away and modified the train-orders, so that Clem Johnson, the engineer who was to take the special from Wadsworth to Parkersburg, suddenly lost all interest in life and climbed into his cab in a towering rage.

"Lost his nerve," he said to his fireman, with a jerk of his head toward the private car. "An' I don't suppose they'll be any runnin' on the same road with Michaels no more — he'll have the swell-

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head so bad. It's tough luck — that's what I call it — mighty tough luck."

"Them fellers never do have any sand," observed the fireman, contemptuously. "We'd 'a' beat Michaels's time easy."

"O' course we would!" growled the engineer. "An' now we've got t' crawl along like a funeral percession. I'll show him!" and he pulled the throttle open viciously, so that the train started with a jerk that caused the great man to jump with alarm.

The engineer observed his orders not to exceed fifty miles an hour, but the trip was not a pleasant one, for all that; for he took a savage delight in banging and jerking the train, so that even the great private car felt the uneven motion, and swayed and groaned and jumped in a manner which reduced its distinguished occupant to the verge of prostration. Finally he called the conductor.

"What's the matter with this track, anyway?" he demanded. "I feel like I was riding over a corduroy road. Has there been an earthquake, or what?"

"No, sir," answered the conductor, who understood what the engineer was doing and was delighted thereat. "There ain't been no earthquake. The track is perfectly smooth, sir. I don't think the engine's working just right — a little uneven."

"Uneven!" repeated the great man. "Is that the best word you can find for it? It reminds me

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of a bucking broncho! Heavens!" and he buried his face in his hands again.

"Huh!" grunted the conductor to himself, as he withdrew. "Lost his nerve!"

It was true. The great man had lost his nerve. Not for weeks did he regain his usual tone. The leaders in New York were greatly disappointed by his lack of "ginger;" his speeches did not have that telling quality they had possessed of old — in a word, he lost New York State and the Presidency — and all, perhaps, because a freight crew went to sleep on a siding out in Ohio. An incident, surely, to rank with the spider that saved Mahomet or the whinny which made Darius King of Persia.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW TIME - CARD

So, day by day, the work at the dispatchers' office went on in its accustomed routine. Always there was the clatter of the keys, always the trains pulling in and out of the yards, always the coming and going of men like a mighty and well-disciplined army. They were servants of the mightiest industrial force in the world, the thing which had done most for the development of commerce, the advancement of trade — the thing without which, in a word, the world of to-day would not be possible. Few people realize the tremendous business done by the railroads of the world. In the United States alone, in a single year, besides the eight hundred million passengers carried, a billion and a half tons of freight are moved, the total passenger and freight mileage reaching the inconceivable total of two hundred and forty-two billion, for which the roads received nearly two and a half billion dollars, or more than twice the amount of the national debt. Figures like that, of course, make no impression on the mind — they are too vast, too grandiose for human comprehension.

THE NEW TIME - CARD

And the gigantic task of moving this freight and these passengers goes on from day to day, from hour to hour, in the usual course of things, just as the sun rises and sets, almost as though operated by a law of nature and not by man's exertion, by the law of gravitation and not in defiance of it. And just as people grow accustomed to the miracle of sunrise and cease to wonder at it, so they grow accustomed to the miracle of steam. Only those who, day by day, do battle to keep the great machine in operation realize fully what a desperate battle it is. Allan West was soon to have a personal experience with a vital part of the mechanism with which he had never before come in contact.

"Allan," Superintendent Schofield said one morning, stopping beside his desk, "we've got our new time-card about ready, and I wish you'd arrange to-morrow so you can come and help us string the chart."

"String the chart?" repeated Allan.

"Yes. It'll interest you — besides, it's something you ought to know. We're going to throw Number Two half an hour later, and make one or two other changes."

Allan knew that the "time-card meeting" had been held at Cincinnati a few days before. Indeed, Mr. Schofield had talked over with him the projected changes, and the reasons for them.

For it must be understood that railroads everywhere are striving ceaselessly to arrange their

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time-cards to meet the needs of the public and to secure the greatest possible economy of operation. It is foolish for a road to run two trains when one will do, but while the number of trains is cut to a minimum, they must be run at such hours as will be convenient to the public which they serve, otherwise they won't get the traffic. A certain number of people, of course, have to travel every day, whether the trains run at convenient hours or not; but with a much greater number travel is a matter of pleasure, of choice, and with them convenience has great weight — much greater than one would suppose.

Thus, in the vicinity of a great city, there must be locals going in in the morning and coming out in the afternoon, so that "commuters" may get back and forth to work, and shoppers may be accommodated. These trains must be sufficient in number to meet the demand, and must be run at such hours as will suit the different classes of people they serve. If the train-service is bad, the "commuters" will move, if they can, to a place where it is better — where they can get to and from work more cheaply and easily. Rents will go down in the district which is badly served, real estate will decrease in value, an undesirable class of people will move into it, and the traffic from it will drop away to little or nothing. So the road, by carelessness at the beginning, brings its own punishment surely at the end.

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Further, it is immaterial as to the time that the through trains pass these points, since they gather practically no traffic from them. A through train considers only its terminals — when is the best time for it to leave New York and arrive at Cincinnati. Can such a train be arranged to leave New York after business hours and arrive at Pittsburg before them? Two great roads are at the present time running trains between New York and Chicago with the boast that one can go from one city to the other without losing an hour of the business day.

So with through trains, the most important object is to shorten the running time as much as possible. The "locals" can take care of the short-haul traffic, and their hours can be accommodated to it; but the through trains must get from terminus to terminus, with regard only to the time of leaving and arriving.

In consequence, time-cards are constantly changing. Perhaps a curve has been straightened, or a tunnel completed that saves a long detour; perhaps a grade has been lowered, an old bridge replaced with a new one — such changes as these every road is constantly making. And time-cards change with them.

Or perhaps faster and heavier engines are purchased, and a complete change of time-card is at once rendered necessary. For every through train runs as fast as it can run with safety. And as a

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road grows older, and time-card after time-card is made out, the running time of the trains is made more and more perfect, until there are long stretches where the engineer does not have to touch his throttle, so exactly does the running time of the train correspond with the best the engine can do. The passenger who remarks to a companion upon the smoothness of the running, and who glances with approbation at his watch as the train pulls into its destination exactly on time, does not know what patient and long experimenting it took to achieve that result.

“Ya-as,” drawled old Bill Williams, sarcastically, when I read the above paragraph to him. “Ya-as, that’s all very pretty in theory — but how about the practice, my boy?”

I had to confess that I was weak in practice. But I knew that Bill was strong, for he had served over forty years at the throttle before an affection of the eyes had caused him to retire from active service and to open a railroad boarding-house, by means of which he still managed to keep in touch with the life of the road.

“Wa-al,” he went on, taking a deliberate chew of tobacco, and putting his feet up on the railing of the veranda which ran across the front of the Williams House, “theory an’ practice air two mighty different things. Time-cards is usually built on theory, an’ it’s up to the engineer t’ main-

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tain 'em in practice. The trouble is that time-cards is made out fer engines in puffect condition, which not one in ten is. So the engineer has to make up fer the faults of his engine — a good deal like a good rider'll lift his hoss over a five-barred gate, where a bad one'll come a cropper every time. So when y' see a train that's come a thousand mile, pull in on time to the minute, don't you go an' make the mistake o' thinkin' it was the engine, or the time-card, or even the dispatchers what did it, 'cause it wasn't. It was the crews what brought thet there train through in spite o' wind an' weather an' other folkses mistakes."

Nevertheless, even Bill would admit, I think, the necessity of carefully and intelligently prepared time-cards, and certainly there was no one item in the operation of the road to which the officials gave such close and continued attention. Two or three meetings were held at the general offices at Cincinnati, at which all of the officials of the transportation department, as well as the general officials, were present. Here, with data carefully collected, it was decided how many passenger and freight trains were to be run, what changes of time were desirable, and at what hour and minute each train was to leave and arrive at the termini of the division. It now remained to provide the meeting-points for these trains, and this task was left to the division officials at Wadsworth. It was this

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ceremony, known as "stringing the chart," at which Allan had been invited to assist.

The chart itself was a large map about five feet high by eight wide, covered with numberless parallel lines. Across the top and bottom of the board, at equal distances, were twenty-four numbers, representing the twenty-four hours. They began at twelve midnight, ran up to twelve noon, and then to twelve midnight again. From top to bottom of the board, connecting these numbers, perpendicular lines were drawn. The space between the numbers was then divided into twelve equal parts, and lighter lines drawn connecting them. The space between every two of these lines therefore represented five minutes, and there were 288 of them running across the board from top to bottom.

On each side of the board at the top, and on a line with the top row of numbers, the word "Cincinnati" was printed. At the bottom of the board, on either side, and in line with the numbers there, was the word "Parkersburg." These are the termini of the division, and they are 195.3 miles apart. Then along each side of the board the names of all the stations of the line were printed, the distances between them and the termini being carefully figured out so that the distances on the board should be exactly proportionate to the real distances. Horizontal lines were then drawn across the board, connecting the names of the same station, and the time-chart was complete.

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Usually it was stored in a back room, out of the way, carefully covered so that it would be kept clean. On the morning in question, however, it was uncovered, carefully wiped off, and then wheeled into the superintendent's office, where the ceremony of stringing it was to be performed. Mr. Schofield was there, and the train master, and Allan, eager to see the process. On the superintendent's desk lay two balls of string, one white and one red, and a note-book in which had been jotted down the time assigned to each train.

"Well, I guess we're ready to begin," said Mr. Schofield, picking up the white ball and stepping before the chart. "We'll string the east-bound trains first," he added.

Let it be said here that east-bound trains are always indicated by even numbers and west-bound trains by odd ones. Thus, on any road, "Number Four," for instance, will always be an east-bound train, and "Number Three" will always be a west-bound one. In addition to which, it should be remembered that east-bound trains always have right of way over west-bound trains of the same class. That is to say, when an east-bound and west-bound first-class passenger train meet, it is the west-bound train which runs in on a siding and waits until the other sweeps by on the main track.

"Now," continued Mr. Schofield, "we'll begin with Number Four, which has rights over every-

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thing. Look at those notes, Allan, and tell me at what time it is to leave Cincinnati."

"At 12.15 P. M.," said Allan, picking up the note-book.

"Correct. Now this line running up and down across the centre of the board is for twelve o'clock noon. This third line after it is for 12.15, five minutes for each line. This line across the top of the board is for Cincinnati, so I drive a pin there and loop the end of this cord around it, so," and he suited the action to the word. "Now, at what time does Number Four reach Wadsworth?"

"At 3.05," answered Allan, looking at the notes.

"Well — see, here is the 3.05 line, and here, running across the board, about midway down, is the Wadsworth line. I drive another pin at the intersection of these two lines, draw the cord tight and loop it about this second pin. And now what?"

"The train stops at Wadsworth five minutes to change engines," said Allan.

"So I drive a third pin right out along this Wadsworth line at the intersection of it and the 3.10 o'clock line. Now, what time does it reach Parkersburg?"

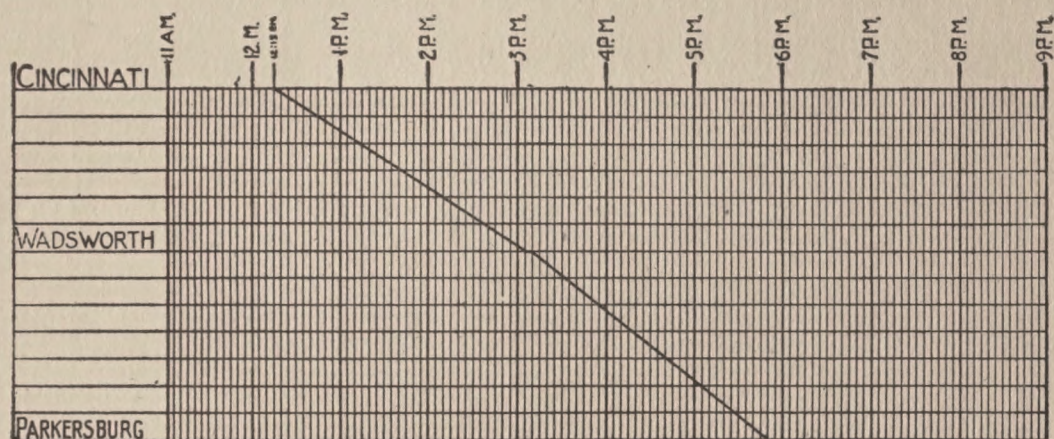
"At 5.50 P. M."

"Well, here's the 5.50 line, and here, at the bottom of the board, is the Parkersburg line. I drive a fourth pin there, draw the cord tight and tie it. Then I cut it off, and tie at the end this little tag

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marked 'Number Four.' Now what does that cord indicate? ”

Allan, looking at the board, saw a line that ran roughly like this:



(For complete time-table, see diagram facing page 60)

“Why,” he answered, after a moment, his eyes shining, “the cord indicates the exact time that the train passes every station along the line.”

“Exactly,” assented Mr. Schofield. “Now, just by way of illustration, we’ll put on a west-bound train next,” and he picked up the red ball. “We’ll take Number Three. At what time does it leave Parkersburg? ”

“At 11.40 A. M.”

“So I drive the pin here. When does it reach Wadsworth? ”

“At 2.20 P. M.”

“So the pin goes here. It stays there five minutes, doesn’t it? ”

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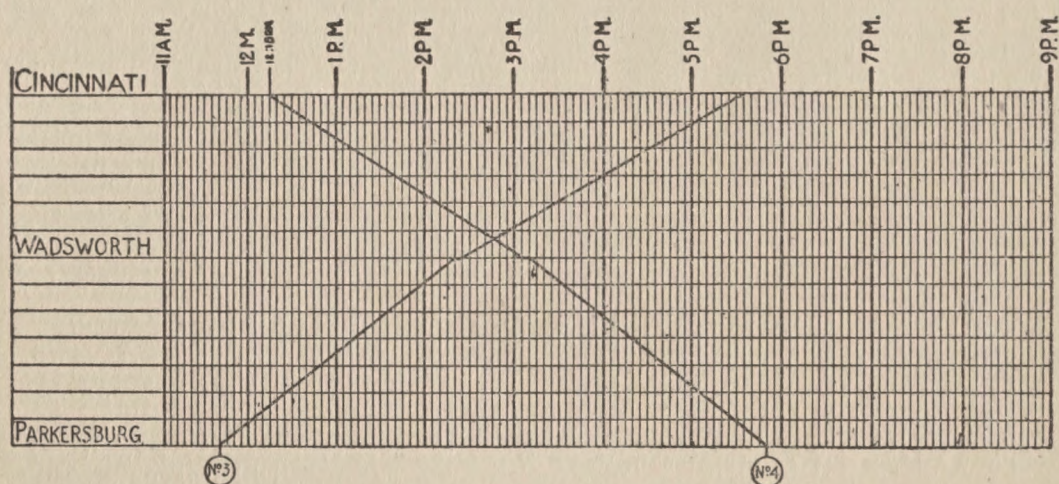
“ Yes — just like Number Four.”

“ So another pin goes here. When does it reach Cincinnati? ”

“ At 5.35 P. M.”

“ And here’s the fourth pin — and there’s your red string across the board, indicating Number Three. Now look at them.”

Here is what Allan saw:



“ You notice the two strings cross at the 2.45 line,” continued Mr. Schofield, “ between Musselman and Roxabel. What does that mean? ”

“ It means the trains will meet there.”

“ But they can’t meet out there on a single track. They’ve got to meet at a station where there’s a siding. So we’ve got to hold Number Three at Musselman three minutes until Number Four can get past — in other words, we’ve got to change the red string a little, like this,” and he drove another pin on the 2.42 line at Musselman, and tied the red string to it. “ That provides a meeting place for

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those two trains. Now let's go ahead with the others."

White strings representing all the east-bound passenger trains were put on the board in the same way. All of them ran more or less parallel with each other, the faster trains inclining more toward the perpendicular and the slower trains more toward the horizontal. To each string was attached a little tag bearing the number of the train, and that being done, the superintendent declared it was time to adjourn for lunch.

An hour later, the work of stringing the west-bound passenger trains was taken up, the red cord being used to represent them. As they necessarily ran in the opposite direction, these strings crossed the strings representing the east-bound trains, and each of these crossings indicated a meeting-point. When the strings were first put on the board, it was found that many of them, as had been the case with those representing trains Three and Four, crossed between stations, and as it is against the rules of all railroading to permit two trains going in opposite directions to meet on the same track, the running time of the trains had to be so altered that the meetings occurred at a station, or at least at a place where there was a siding, so that one train could pull in out of the way of the other. The through passenger trains, which are given preference, were so timed that they could run from end to end of the division without getting out of the

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way of anything; the accommodations usually had two or three short waits, but so carefully were these timed that their passengers would never notice it. In fact, wherever it was possible, the running time of the train was extended a few minutes, so that the delay would be only a minute or two.

After all the passenger trains had been placed on the board and the meeting-points provided for, the freight trains were added. Meeting-points with the freight trains had also to be arranged, but this was comparatively easy, as it was simply a question of the freight heading in at the last siding it could reach in advance of the passenger, and then waiting for the passenger to go by.

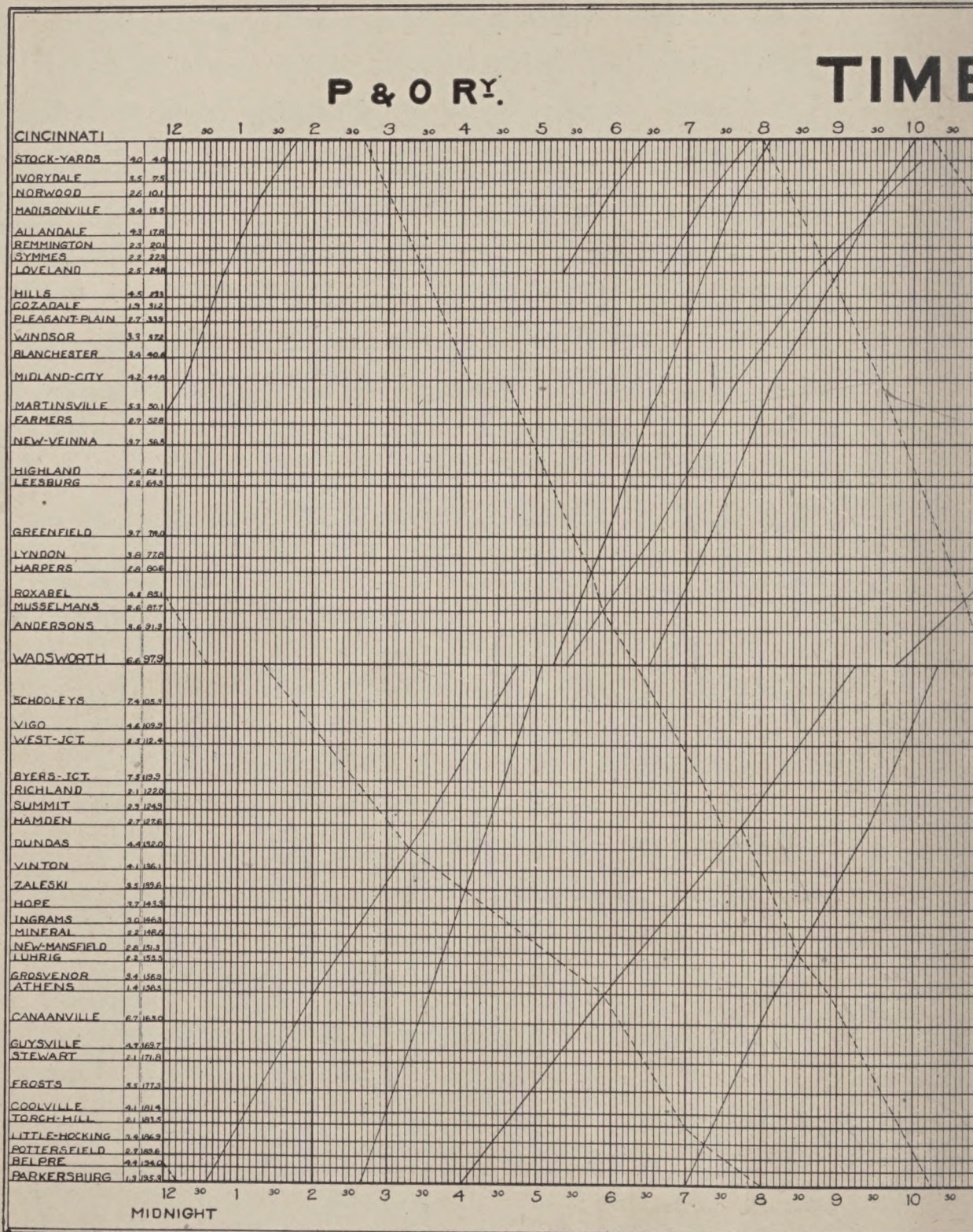
When every train had been placed on the board and every meeting-point provided for, the time at which every train arrived at and left every station was carefully noted down.

"And that's done," said Mr. Schofield, with a sigh of satisfaction. "It's a big job, and I'm mighty glad we won't have to do it soon again. What do you think of it?"

"It's great," Allan answered. "Who thought it out?"

"I don't know. It's been in use for a long time — practically all roads 'string the chart,' just as we have done. It's the safest system that has ever been devised."

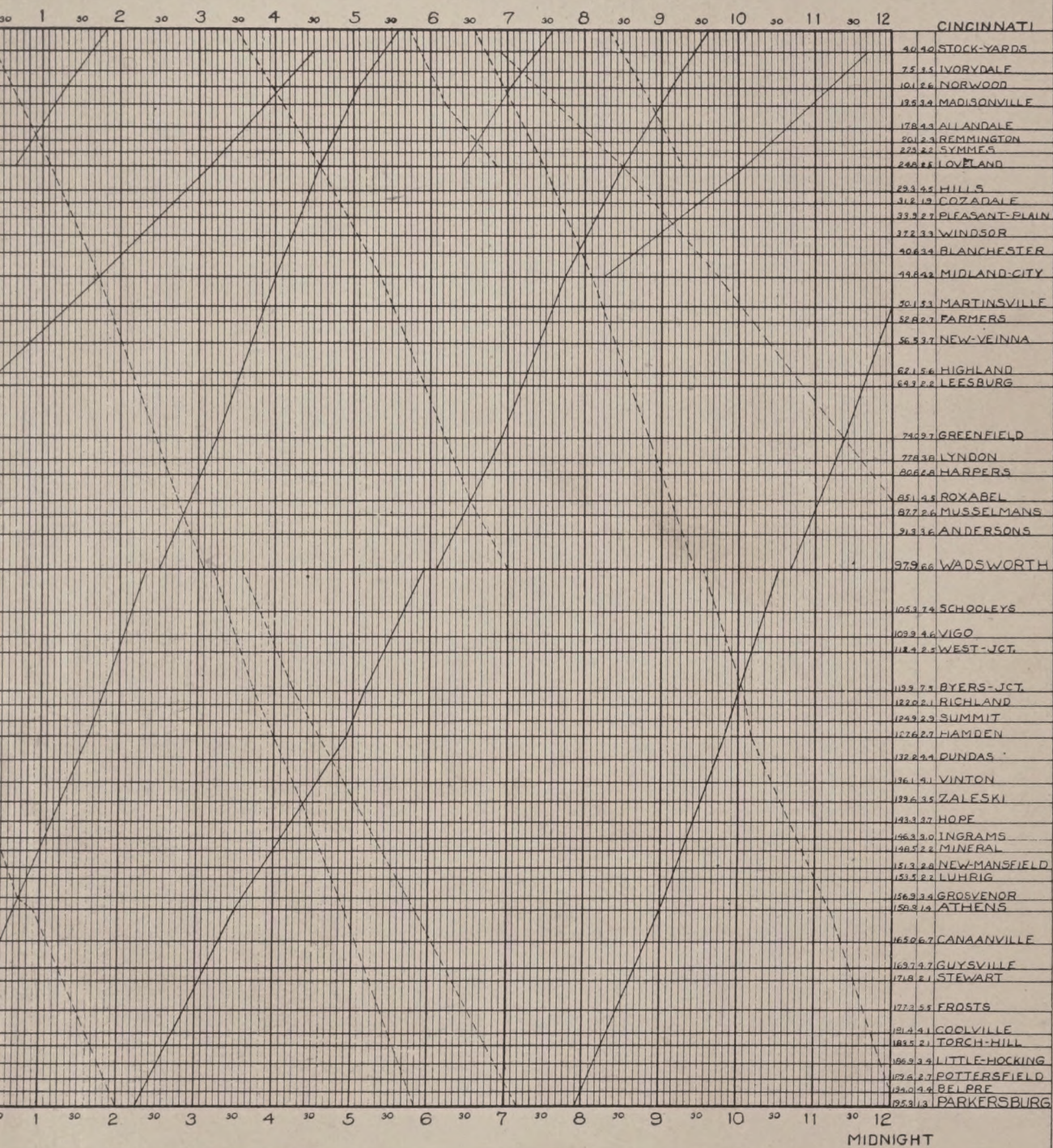
"I don't see how any could be safer," said Allan.



On this chart only the more important trains are shown. Dotted lines have been used to

HART.

OHIO DIVISION.



white cords, or east-bound trains, and solid lines to represent red cords, or west-bound trains.

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“And I’m awfully glad you showed me how it works.”

“Oh, I’d do that, of course,” laughed the superintendent. “I want you to know everything there is to know about railroading. It will all come in handy some day. Now, I’ll turn these notes over to the printer, and we’ll have another bout when we get the proofs.”

In a few days, the first proof of the new time-card was returned to Mr. Schofield, and he and Allan went over it carefully, comparing it with the chart to make certain that there was no error in figures and that every meeting-point was provided for. With the chart to go by, it was impossible that any meeting-point could be overlooked. A second proof was treated in the same way, and finally O. K’d. Then the time-cards were printed — not at all in the form with which the public is acquainted with them, but as large oblong pamphlets of twenty-four pages, — distributed to the road’s employees, and at twelve o’clock midnight on December 21st, the new card went into effect. All the public knew of it was a few lines in the newspapers announcing that this train or the other would arrive a few minutes later or earlier than it had been doing, and most people wondered, if they thought about it at all, why it had been necessary to get out a new time-card at all for changes so unimportant.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE CLOUD

THE installing of a new time-card is not so simple a thing as one might imagine. For that one night, every engineer and conductor has to bear in mind two schedules, the old one and the new one. For, though the new one goes into effect, technically, at midnight, it is, of course, impossible that it should do so in reality. A train, for instance, which started under the old schedule at 10.50 P. M. and which, under the new one, would start fifteen or twenty minutes earlier, could not, once it was out on the road, make up that time, so it was compelled to run by the old schedule until it had finished its trip, even though that carried it over the time after which the new schedule went into effect. In other words, every train which was on the road at midnight, must continue under the old schedule until it reached its destination.

So that night was always one of anxiety. Trainmen, who often get mixed on a single schedule, are only too likely to do so on a double one!

It so happened, however, that the exciting events of that night were not due to forgetfulness, but to

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a danger which no one could foresee or guard against, and which is, in consequence, one most feared by railroad men. And it developed the latent heroism in two men in a way which is still talked of on the rail, where these tales are passed on from mouth to mouth wherever trainmen congregate.

The night was a cold and windy one, with a swirl of snow now and then, just sufficient to obscure the slippery track ahead, and yet not dense enough to cause the engineer to abandon in despair the task of trying to see what he was driving into. As a consequence, Engineer Jim Adams, pulling first section of through freight No. 98, had strained his eyes until they ached, in the effort to descry track and signals. More than once his hand had trembled on the throttle, as he fancied he saw another headlight gleaming through the mist ahead, but which, at the last instant, resolved itself into a reflection of his own. So when an unmistakable red glow did appear there, he waited an instant and batted his eyes savagely once or twice before he threw on the brakes.

"It's the Jones Run bridge!" yelled the front brakeman, who, perched on the fireman's seat, had seen the glare at the same instant. "Git out o' here!" And jumping to the floor of the cab, he balanced himself an instant in the gangway and then sprang out into the darkness.

The fireman took one look at the swirling flames

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ahead and followed him. Then the engineer, having set the brakes and closed the throttle, also leaped out into the darkness. But even as he leaped, he suddenly realized that the train had just impetus enough to carry it to the bridge. It would stop there, be consumed, and the loss to the company would be thousands and thousands of dollars.

By a supreme effort, he landed on his feet, and then, running a step or two, managed to catch the hand-hold on the first freight car, as it passed him. In a minute, he had clambered up the ladder, over the coal in the tender and down into the cab again, where he released the brakes, opened the throttle wide, and started on a wild run for the bridge. In an instant, the flames were around him and he felt the bridge shake and sway, but it held, and the train crossed in safety.

Meanwhile, back in the caboose, a strange scene was enacting. The brakeman and conductor, who had been cosily sleeping in their bunks, were suddenly thrown out to the floor by a terrific impact, and every loose object seemed to be hurling itself toward the front end of the car. It took a minute for them to disentangle themselves and get to their feet again. Then they made a simultaneous rush for the door, just as the brakes were released and the train jerked forward again. The conductor opened the door and started to put his head out to see what was the matter, when he suddenly found himself surrounded by a swirl of flame.

THE LITTLE CLOUD

"Gosh all whittaker!" he yelled, and slammed the door shut again. Then he jumped for the box of fusees which every caboose carries.

The brakeman, who was green, was too frightened even to be interested. Otherwise he would have seen the conductor jerk out two fusees, and then, opening the door again, drop off the train just as it cleared the bridge. He scrambled down the bank, and, holding the fusees high over his head, plunged into the icy water without an instant's hesitation, and then, stopping only to light one of the fusees at a glowing ember, raced wildly away down the track, waving it above his head. For he had remembered the second section following close behind; he knew that the bridge would be so weakened that another train could not cross it; feared that, in the swirling snow, the engineer might not see the flames until too late; and instantly took the only effective means to stop the oncoming train.

Stop it he did, of course, and after making sure the bridge could not be saved, both trains flagged their way to the nearest stations to give word of the disaster. Ten hours later, a temporary bridge replaced the old one, and traffic was running as usual.

An investigation of the cause of the fire followed a few days later, but nothing definite concerning it could be discovered. It might have started, as so many do, from ashes dropped from the fire-box of a passing train; or it might have been set on

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fire by tramps, either by accident or design. Orders were at once sent in for an iron bridge to replace the wooden one, so that a repetition of the accident would be impossible.

One thing, however, resulted from the investigation — the indication of possible carelessness on the part of another engineer. Half an hour before the first section of ninety-eight had passed, the evening accommodation had crossed the bridge. It seemed impossible that the fire should have got such a headway in that time, and the presumption strongly was that the bridge was on fire when the passenger train crossed it, and that the engineer was not attending to his duties, or he would have seen it. The fireman, engaged in shovelling coal into the fire-box, and blinded by the glare of the flames, would probably not have noticed it, and on a passenger train no brakeman rides in the cab; but it could not have escaped the eyes of the engineer if he had been watching the tracks. It was, of course, possible that he had seen it, but had not stopped his train or given warning through some motive of hate or personal revenge; and inquiry, indeed, developed the fact that there was a bitter quarrel of long standing between him and Jim Adams, the engineer of first ninety-eight — but this may have been merely a coincidence.

At any rate, Mr. Plumfield hesitated to think that any man would have passed the fire from such a motive, and preferred to believe that the engineer

THE LITTLE CLOUD

of the accommodation had merely been remiss. The engineer, a burly fellow named Rafe Bassett, stoutly denied that this was the case, and declared that he had noticed the bridge especially and that it was all right.

Something in his demeanour, however, aroused Mr. Plumfield's suspicions. Bassett was perhaps a trifle too emphatic in his denials. At any rate, he was suspended without pay.

The day after this happened, Mr. Schofield paused beside the train master's desk.

"What was the trouble with Bassett, George?" he asked.

"Well, I can't say, exactly," answered Mr. Plumfield. "But he struck me as being not altogether on the square. You know he's been in trouble before," and he brought out the little red book.

Mr. Schofield nodded.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I'm afraid this is going to make trouble," he added, after a moment. "You know Bassett is a great brotherhood man, and is one of those big-mouthed agitators who are always talking about the wrongs of labour. His lodge is calling a special meeting to-night to consider his case."

"Is it?" asked Mr. Plumfield, grimly. "Well, I suppose there'll be a grievance committee to wait on me in the morning."

And there was. Scarcely had he seated himself at his desk next day, when three engineers, cap in

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hand, appeared at the door and requested an audience.

"All right, boys; come in," said the train master. "What's the trouble?"

"It's about Bassett," explained the spokesman. "He's laid off, I hear."

"Yes," said the train master. "Laid off till further notice."

"What for?" asked the spokesman.

Mr. Plumfield hesitated. It was rather difficult to formulate the charge against Bassett.

"For knowing more about the burning of the Jones Run bridge the other night than he's willing to tell."

"Do you mean he set it on fire?" inquired one of the men, incredulously.

"Oh, no; but I think he ran past it after it was on fire and didn't stop to put it out, as he should have done."

"Does Bassett admit it?"

"No, of course not."

"Why should he run past the fire?"

"Maybe he was asleep and didn't see it."

"And have you any evidence?"

"None but his manner," answered Mr. Plumfield frankly.

"Well," said the spokesman, twirling his cap in his hands, "all I can say is that that's mighty poor evidence, it seems to me. We had a meetin' at the lodge last night, and we was appointed a commit-

THE LITTLE CLOUD

tee to see you and demand that Bassett be reinstated at once."

"All right," said Mr. Plumfield, "I'll consider it."

"And when can we have our answer?"

"This afternoon at three o'clock," answered the train master sharply.

"All right, sir," said the spokesman of the committee, and the three men filed out.

Mr. Plumfield looked over at Allan, after a moment, with a little laugh.

"I'm afraid those fellows have got me," he said. "I'm morally convinced that Bassett's crooked, but there's no way to prove it. I'm afraid I'll have to back down. I made a mistake in suspending him in the first place, but the man's manner irritated me."

And so, that afternoon, when the committee reappeared, it was informed that Bassett had been reinstated as requested.

They filed out with ill-concealed triumph on their faces, and Mr. Plumfield felt uncomfortably that his mistake had been a serious one. In gaining a victory, Bassett had enthroned himself more firmly than ever in the confidence of his associates.

Three hours later, in the dusk of the early winter evening, Mr. Plumfield left his office and started toward his home. As he crossed the tracks, and came opposite a saloon which occupied the corner nearest the station, the door suddenly swung open

THE YOUNG TRAIN MASTER

and two or three men stumbled out. They were talking loudly, and as they came under the glare of the street lamps, Mr. Plumfield saw that one of them was Bassett. The engineer saw him at the same moment.

"Why, here's the train master," he cried, lurching forward. "Well, so ye had t' crawfish, didn't ye, me bird? An' well fer ye ye did!"

"Bassett," said Mr. Plumfield, quietly, "you're drunk. Take care, or you'll get a dose a good deal worse than the last one."

"Oh, I will, will I?" cried Bassett, coming closer. "Well, you jest try it! You jest try it!"

"All right," said Mr. Plumfield. "You don't need to report any more. You're not in the employ of the P. & O. any longer."

"Ain't I?" cried Bassett. "Well, we'll see what the boys say to that! You heerd this, boys —"

But without waiting to hear more, Mr. Plumfield went on his way. This time, he felt, he would have to stick to his decision, no matter what happened. And he felt, too, that he was right.

CHAPTER VII

A THREAT FROM MR. NIXON

THE storm was not long in bursting. Again there was a special meeting of the lodge; again a grievance committee waited on Mr. Plumfield, but it met a very different reception from that which had been given the former one.

"I have just one thing to tell you," he said, when he had listened to their complaint, "and that is that Rafe Bassett will never be given a job on this road while I'm train master. He was drunk the other night, and you know it."

"He denies it," said the chairman of the committee. "He admits he'd had a glass or two of beer, but that ain't a penitentiary offence."

"Especially when a man ain't on duty," chimed in another.

"And he says he thought he was still suspended," chimed in a third, "and he supposed he could do as he pleased."

"He didn't think anything of the sort," said Mr. Plumfield, sharply. "The first words he said to me were that I'd had to crawfish. So he knew he'd been re-instated. But he'll never be re-instated again."

THE YOUNG TRAIN MASTER

"Are them your last words, Mr. Plumfield?" inquired one of his auditors, ominously.

"Yes, they're my last words," retorted the train master, and turned to his work, while the committee filed out.

He foresaw, of course, what would happen, but he felt that to re-instate Bassett would for ever destroy discipline among the men under him. He stated the case to Mr. Schofield, and that official agreed with him that Bassett could never be reinstated, but that the matter must be fought out to a finish.

Hostilities were not long in commencing. The local lodge made a report—more or less biased—of the occurrence to the general officials of the order, and one of the latter came posthaste to the scene. A day or two later, Mr. Schofield received the following letter:

"WADSWORTH, OHIO, January 16, 190—

"MR. R. E. SCHOFIELD,

"*Superintendent Ohio Division,*

"*P. & O. Railway.*

"*Dear Sir:*—As a representative of the Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Railway Engineers, I ask a conference with you at the earliest possible moment.

"Yours truly,

"H. F. NIXON,

"*Special Delegate.*"

A THREAT FROM MR. NIXON

Mr. Schofield answered at once, setting the conference for next day and asking both Mr. Plumfield and Allan to be present. For he desired some witnesses of the interview.

Nixon showed up promptly at the appointed time. He was a heavy-set man with a red face and big black moustache. He wore a sweeping fur overcoat, and, when he drew off his gloves, a big seal ring with diamond settings was visible upon the little finger of his right hand. Mr. Schofield greeted him courteously, invited him to take off his overcoat and sit down, and then stepped to the door.

"Bob," he called to his office boy, "ask Mr. Plumfield and Mr. West to step this way at once, will you?"

Nixon, who had thrown his overcoat across a chair and got out a big black cigar, paused with it halfway to his lips.

"Not calling the company for me, are you?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said the superintendent, quietly. "You've come about the Bassett business, haven't you?"

Nixon nodded.

"Well, Mr. Plumfield is the one with whom Bassett had the trouble. I thought you'd like to hear his story."

"Oh, all right," said Nixon, sitting down and lighting his cigar. "Only I know the story already."

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"Maybe you've only heard one side of it," suggested Mr. Schofield, smiling.

"Well, maybe I have," assented Nixon, and when Mr. Plumfield and Allan entered, he greeted them with a fair degree of cordiality.

"And now, Mr. Plumfield," said the superintendent, when the introductions were over, "I wish you would tell Mr. Nixon exactly what happened between you and Bassett."

So the train master told the story of his encounter with the drunken engineer, while Nixon sat back in his chair puffing his cigar meditatively, and nodding from time to time.

"You know, of course," he said, when Mr. Plumfield had finished, "that Bassett denies he was drunk, and so do the boys who were with him. He admits that he'd had a glass or two of beer, but there's nothing against that, is there, when a man's off duty?"

"There's a rule against the use of intoxicants," replied the superintendent, slowly, "and against a man's being impudent on duty or off."

"And there's no prospect of your taking Bassett back?" asked Nixon.

"Not the slightest," answered Mr. Schofield.

"I suppose you know what that means?" inquired Nixon, blowing out a puff of smoke and gazing at it with half-closed eyes, as it floated slowly upwards.

"What does it mean?"

A THREAT FROM MR. NIXON

"It means a strike."

"Is the brotherhood as foolish as all that?"

"The brotherhood is bound to protect the interests of all its members."

"Even those who don't deserve it?"

"The brotherhood must decide who's worthy and who's not. It can't let outsiders do it."

"Well, all right," said Mr. Schofield. "It's up to you. I guess we can get some more engineers."

"Oh, you'll need more than engineers," said Nixon, easily. "You'll need firemen and brakemen and conductors and switchmen—the whole force, in fact."

The superintendent sat staring at his visitor, his brows knitted.

"You mean they'll strike in sympathy?" he asked, at last.

"Exactly," and Nixon smiled blandly.

"What kind of fools are railroad men anyhow?"

"I'll tell you how it is," said Nixon. "Railroad men realize that they've got to stand together. You remember those spell-binders who used to go around hollering 'My country, right or wrong!' Well, that's our principle. Besides, the time's ripe for a strike."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean there hasn't been a real strike for some time an' the boys are ready for a little excitement."

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You see, we've found a better way than strikin', but not half so interestin'."

"I think I know what you mean," said Mr. Schofield, slowly.

"Yes — I guess you do. We've found out that we can get legislatures to pass most any law we want. It's different from the old days, when the railroads carried the legislatures in their pockets. The pendulum's swung the other way. Now it's as much as a man's life's worth to vote for a railroad measure or against one that railroad employees ask for. So things come our way easy. Besides, that anti-pass law has hurt you bad."

"Yes, it has," Mr. Schofield agreed, with a grim smile.

"It was a mighty cheap and convenient way of buyin' influence," continued Nixon. "For a thousand or two miles of mileage, you got seven-eighths of the legislatures without further expense. They didn't consider it takin' a bribe. Now even money won't do the trick. You're up a tree."

"Yes, we are," agreed the superintendent, "until the pendulum swings back again. You fellows are too eager. You're killing the goose."

"Well, I guess we'll get our share of the eggs," grinned Nixon. "Have you heard of the latest?"

"The latest?"

"The caboose bill?"

"No," said Mr. Schofield. "What's that?"

"Well," said Nixon, chuckling to himself, "the

A THREAT FROM MR. NIXON

railroads, as you know, never waste a thought on the comfort or safety of their employees — ”

“ No, of course not,” agreed Mr. Schofield, ironically.

“ All they think of is earnings an’ big salaries for the officers. One of the most inhuman afflictions which freight conductors and brakemen have to put up with in modern times is the caboose. Have you ever ridden in a caboose? ”

“ Hundreds of times! ”

“ Oh, I forgot,” said Nixon, grinning, “ I thought I was addressin’ the legislature. I was goin’ to paint for them the torture of ridin’ in a caboose, the impossibility of sleepin’ there; how a few years of it wrecks a man’s health, and so forth.”

“ I see you’re a good hand at fancy pictures,” said the superintendent, drily.

“ A man has to be to hold my job,” said Nixon, with a broad grin. “ But, cuttin’ all that out, the bill compels the railroads to use no caboose less ’n forty feet in length. The berths must be comfortable an’ sanitary, with the sheets changed every trip. There must be all the toilet conveniences — ”

“ Why not compel us to hitch a Pullman to every freight train, with porter and everything complete? ” inquired the superintendent.

“ Oh, no,” protested Nixon, waving his hand. “ We’re reasonable. We don’t want anything but our rights.”

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Mr. Schofield's face was flushed and he opened his lips for an angry retort, but thought better of it and closed them again. Then he laughed.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead. Kill the goose. But were you serious about that strike?"

"Never more serious in my life."

"When will it be called?"

"When I give the word," said Nixon, "not before."

And he cast at the superintendent a glance full of meaning.

The latter stared at him, then down at his desk, drumming with absent fingers.

"Well," he said, at last, looking up, "don't call it for a couple of days. I'll have to ask instructions from headquarters."

"All right," agreed Nixon, rising and slipping into his coat. "Let me see — this is Wednesday. I'll come in Friday morning at this time for your answer. How'll that suit?"

Mr. Schofield nodded curtly, and with a bland wave of the hand to the others, Nixon went to the door and let himself out.

The superintendent gazed moodily at the closed door for a moment, then he rose and walked to the window and stared down over the yards.

"Well," he said at last, turning back to the others, "there are three courses open."

"Three?" repeated Mr. Plumfield, in evident surprise.

A THREAT FROM MR. NIXON

"Yes, three. In the first place, we can back down and re-instate Bassett."

"Yes."

"In the second place, we can refuse to do it and fight it out."

"Yes."

"And in the third place we can avoid either."

"How?"

"By bribing Nixon."

"Bribing Nixon?"

"Yes. You heard him say that there wouldn't be any strike until he called it?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't see how he looked at me when he said it. If ever a man invited a bribe, without putting the invitation in so many words, he did. A thousand dollars would do it."

"But you won't offer it!" cried Allan eagerly. "You won't do that!"

"No," said Mr. Schofield, smiling as he looked at the flushed face. "I won't do it. I'm going to advise a fight. But the decision doesn't rest with me. I'll have to go to Cincinnati in the morning and take it up with the general manager."

"But to give a bribe —" Allan began.

"Sounds bad, doesn't it? And yet I don't think the general manager will waste much time thinking about the moral side of it. That's not what he's there for. He's there to work for the best interests of the road. A strike is sure to cost us a good

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many times a thousand dollars — how many times nobody can tell till it's over. Which is best for the road? ”

Allan's head was whirling. After all, there was truth in what Mr. Schofield said. The only question for the general manager to consider was just that — what was best for the road.

Mr. Schofield turned from the window and looked at him again.

“ I tell you what,” he said, suddenly, “ I'd like to have you go along. Will you? ”

“ Go along? ”

“ And hear the other side of it. It'll do you good, and maybe it'll do us good to have you,” he added.

“ I'll be glad to,” answered Allan, his face flushing suddenly, and hastened back to his desk to get things in shape so that he could be absent on the morrow.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. ROUND'S DECISION

AND so it happened that Allan arose next morning about two hours earlier than usual, in order to catch the five o'clock train for Cincinnati. It reminded him of the far-off days when he was taking his trick of track-walking in the early morning. As he came down the stairs, he saw a yellow band of light under the kitchen door, and he heard somebody clattering about within. He opened the door to find Mary already busy with the kitchen stove.

"Why, Allan," she said, "what're ye doin' up so early?"

"I've got to go to Cincinnati on Number One," he answered. "I'll be back on Two to-night."

"Why didn't ye tell me last night?" she demanded. "I'd 'a' had your breakfast ready."

"I know you would," Allan answered, looking at the patient, kindly face. "That's the reason I didn't say anything. I'll get breakfast on the diner. Good-bye," and snatching up hat and overcoat, he was off.

He reached the station just as the train was pulling in and found Mr. Schofield awaiting him. To-

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gether they clambered into the Pullman and took their seats in the smoking compartment.

It was still quite dark, but a faint band of gray over the hills to the east told that the dawn was not far distant. The train rolled out of the yards, through the deserted streets, along the embankment by the dark river, past the twin bridges spanning canal and highway at the city limits, up the long grade that led to the slate cut, through the cut, over the bridge spanning the deep ravine beyond, and so on toward Cincinnati. For some time, neither Allan nor Mr. Schofield spoke, but sat silently staring out of the window, for every foot of the way had some association for them. It was that embankment which they had laboured so hard to save in time of flood, when the mighty current of the river was slowly seeping over it; it was in that cut that Allan had encountered Reddy Magraw, half crazed, one wild night; it was from the bridge beyond that a gang of wreckers had attempted to hurl the pay-car. How familiar it all was — how near, and yet how far away, those days seemed!

Then, as the dawn lightened, a tousle-headed man came in, coat, collar and shoes in hand, and made a hasty toilet.

"Couldn't sleep a wink last night," he said, when he had got his hands and face washed, his collar on and his tie tied. "This road certainly has got 'em all beat for curves."

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"It *does* wind a little as it comes through the mountains," agreed Mr. Schofield, smiling.

"Wind!" exclaimed the stranger. "It corkscrews!"

"You see, it has to follow the streams," explained the superintendent.

"Well, the streams must 'a' been drunk when they struck out their path, then. Well, well," he added, glancing through the window at the frost-whitened fields, "that's the first time I've seen any frost for two years."

"Where've you been?" inquired Mr. Schofield.

"Down at Panama. I run an engine on the Isthmus railroad."

"Do you?" and Mr. Schofield looked at him with interest. "How are things getting along down there?"

"The dirt is certainly flying some. But it's an almighty big job we've tackled."

"Oh, by the way," Mr. Schofield added, "there used to be a brakeman on this road named Guy Kirk, who went to Panama about a year and a half ago. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Hear of him? I guess I did. He's a conductor, now, freight, and everybody thinks a whole lot of him. And he gets around mighty lively considerin' what he went through."

"Went through? How do you mean?"

"Well, sir," said the stranger, getting out a darkly-coloured brier and filling it from a red-

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leather pouch, "it was this way. There's a mighty mean grade going down into Ancon — mighty mean. It's steep and it's got a sharp curve at the bottom. It's pretty ticklish getting down sometimes, especially when the rails are slippery and the road-bed squashy after one of them heavy tropical rains. One night a heavy freight, on which Kirk was front brakeman, started down that grade. The engineer threw on his air, but there wasn't any, and the first thing he knowed they were scootin' down that grade at forty miles an hour. The engineer whistled five or six times to warn the crew in the caboose and then he and his fireman jumped."

"And what did Kirk do?" asked Mr. Schofield, deeply interested.

"Well, sir," answered the narrator, slowly exhaling a long puff, "Kirk didn't jump. Instead o' that, he hustled out on that train an' began to set the hand-brakes. The first eight or ten cars were full of nut coal. Kirk only got about two brakes set, when the train hit the curve. The rails spread, o' course; Kirk hit the ground first an' the ten cars o' nut coal piled up on top of him. Nobody ever expected to see him alive again, but when they dug the coal off, blamed if there he didn't set in a kind o' little hut the cars had made over him as they fell. Only both his legs was caught below the knee an' broke so bad that they never did get quite straight again. But it wasn't long after that he got his promotion."

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Other occupants of the sleeper had come in while the story was in progress, and a few minutes later came the first call to breakfast. Allan, at least, was ready for it, and he and Mr. Schofield lost no time in seeking the diner.

Perhaps no other one improvement in railway service has added as much to the comfort and convenience of the travelling public as has this, which enables the passengers on any first class train to eat their meals at leisure, when they want them, and to procure well-cooked and appetizing food, temptingly served amid pleasant surroundings. It is not so many years since the passenger was dependent for his food either on such supplies as he had brought with him, or upon hasty lunches in dirty depot dining-rooms, where the cold and unpleasant food was bolted in fear and trembling lest the train puffing outside pull away. Not that the proprietors of the dining-rooms themselves were wholly to blame for this condition, for they never knew how many customers they were going to have, trains were often late, fifteen or twenty minutes was the utmost time allowed for a meal by the management of any road, and not more than half of that was available for actual eating, while to keep free from soot and smoke and cinders a dining-room in a depot building was a task beyond human ingenuity.

After the meal, Mr. Schofield led the way to the rear of the diner, where, from the platform, they

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could watch the track spinning backwards from under them.

"Notice the absence of dust," he said, and, indeed, as the train swept onward, there was practically no dust behind it. "We've accomplished that by washing the gravel before we use it as ballast, instead of dumping it in just as it comes from the gravel-pit, as we used to do. It only costs about half a cent a yard to wash it, and it makes it as clean as crushed stone."

"It certainly makes it a lot cleaner back here," remarked the man in charge of the dining-car. "We can keep the back door open now. The only time we have to shut it," he added, suiting the action to the word, "is when we pass the stock-yards. Nobody can enjoy a meal with that scent blowing in upon them."

The stock-yards consisted of long rows of flimsy frame buildings, lining either side of the tracks for perhaps half a mile just outside of Cincinnati. Here the thousands and thousands of steers, hogs, and sheep shipped in from the west were loaded and unloaded. Narrow runways led from the pens up to the level of the freight-car doors, and up and down these, incoming or outgoing stock was constantly ascending or descending, urged by prods in the hands of the stock-yard men. It was not a pleasant sight, and our two friends contemplated it silently as the train sped past.

"Man has a good deal to answer for in this

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world," remarked Mr. Schofield, "and I sometimes think he'll be called to account pretty severely for the suffering of those poor steers. They are bred out on the prairies, you know, are left absolutely shelterless in winter and freeze or starve to death by thousands. Those that manage to survive, are crowded into the stock-cars and shipped east. There's a law requiring that they be fed and watered every so often, and that they be taken out of the cars after so long a time. But there's nobody to enforce the law, and it's pretty generally disregarded. It's always been a wonder to me that the stock reaches the eastern markets at all."

"What can be done about it?" asked Allan, soberly.

"The railroads can't do anything. But the government could compel all stockmen to furnish adequate shelter and food for their stock in winter, and the torture of this long-distance shipping could be avoided if the big slaughter-houses were out in the stock-raising district, so that only the meat need be shipped. Do you remember," he added, after a moment, "in Bellamy's 'Looking Backward,' how incomprehensible and repulsive the thought of flesh-eating had become? Well, I believe Bellamy was right. Already there is a rapidly growing feeling against meat-eating, and the day is not so very far distant when it will be practically abolished. And a good thing, too."

The train had run under the great train-shed, as

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they were talking, and five minutes later, Mr. Schofield and Allan were shown into the office of General Manager Round. It was a plainly-furnished, business-like room, typical of the man who occupied it — a man who had risen from the ranks and who had endeared himself to every man under him by justice, kindness and square-dealing.

“How are you, boys?” he said, shaking hands with both of them heartily. “Glad to see you. Sit down. Now, Ed, what’s this I hear about a strike?”

“Well,” said Mr. Schofield, “it looks a good deal like we were going to have one.”

“Let’s have the story,” said Mr. Round, settling back in his chair, and he listened with half-closed eyes while Mr. Schofield told the story of the trouble with Bassett and the interview with Nixon.

“And you really think there’ll be a strike?” he asked, when Mr. Schofield had finished.

“Of course Nixon may have been bluffing,” answered the latter slowly, “but I don’t believe it. I think there’ll be a strike, unless —”

“Unless what?” asked Mr. Round, as the superintendent paused.

“Well, we can reinstate Bassett.”

“No, we can’t,” said Mr. Round. “We can’t reinstate Bassett and preserve any discipline on this division. So count that out.”

“I agree with you, of course,” said Mr. Schofield. “There’s a second course open.”

MR. ROUND'S DECISION

"What is it?"

"We can bribe Nixon."

"You think he's bribable?"

"I know he is."

"And what's his price?"

"I don't know that exactly. But I should say about a thousand dollars. Of course, a general strike would cost us a great deal more than that."

Mr. Round nodded. Then he happened to glance at Allan West's burning face.

"What do you think about it, Allan?" he asked.

"I wouldn't bribe a man if it kept the road from being tied up for a year," answered Allan, impetuously. "Besides, you're not really helping matters — the thing will have to be fought out sooner or later. Let's fight it out now. We'll get our trains through in spite of them. We'll have the law back of us."

"The law isn't much of a protection," remarked Mr. Round. "It doesn't so much prevent crime, as punish it. And it isn't much of a compensation to a railroad, after it has had two or three hundred thousand dollars' worth of property destroyed, to have the fellows who did it sent to jail. Besides, what's the use of being so horror-stricken at the idea of bribery? We're always giving or taking bribes. When you tipped the waiter in the diner this morning, you bribed him to give you better service than he gave the other people he was serving."

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"I didn't tip him," said Allan, smiling, "and that was just the reason. I agree with you that tipping is petty bribery, and diminishes the self-respect of both the giver and receiver."

"You've hit it," approved Mr. Round. "To give a bribe diminishes one's self-respect. But has a corporation like a railroad any self-respect?"

"It ought to have."

"Most people seem to think it hasn't even common honesty, because it has had to fight with such weapons as came to hand. Good Lord! does anybody suppose the railroads *wanted* to give passes and contribute to campaign funds, and maintain a lobby, and pay bribes? But they couldn't get what they wanted any other way!"

Allan smiled.

"Sometimes they wanted things they hadn't any business with," he said, "and they're suffering for it now. But I guess they'll pull through. The public will see after a while that they're not so black as they're painted. And right here's a chance to keep this one clean."

Again Mr. Round nodded. Then he wheeled his chair around and for some moments sat staring thoughtfully out of the window. Then he wheeled sharply back.

"Schofield," he said, "you tell Nixon to go ahead and call a strike, if he wants to."

CHAPTER IX

A BUBBLE BURSTS

ALLAN was on his feet, his eyes shining.

"That's great!" he said. "That's great."

Mr. Round motioned him to sit down again.

"It isn't altogether on high moral grounds I'm deciding this way," he said. "It's because I don't think a strike, starting from such a fool cause, will hurt us. I think it will help us. We need public sympathy and public confidence. The public has been weaned away from us by a lot of muck-rakers. Here's a chance to get it back. And now, Ed," he added, "you've got to make a grand-stand play."

"All right," agreed Mr. Schofield. "What is it?"

"You've got to bribe Nixon."

"Bribe Nixon?"

"And show him up."

A light broke over Mr. Schofield's face.

"Oh!" he said. "I see."

"You and I will talk it over," said Mr. Round.

"But it's lunch time," he added, looking at his watch. "Of course you're coming with me."

So the three went out to lunch together, and for

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a time forgot the cares of railroading. Only once was the road referred to.

"I've got to see Mr. Heywood before I go back," Mr. Schofield remarked. "There's one or two little matters I want to take up with him."

Mr. Round's face darkened.

"You won't see him to-day," he said.

"Why not?" questioned Mr. Schofield.

"The fact of the matter is," said Mr. Round, after a moment's hesitation, "Heywood hasn't been at his office for three days."

"Hum!" said Mr. Schofield, his face darkening too. "Has it got that bad? I'd heard stories, of course, but I'd hoped they were exaggerated."

"He's been getting worse and worse, and I don't believe he'll hold his job much longer. He may be let down easy, because he's been a good man — and he'd be a good man yet if he could let drink alone. But it's getting more and more hold on him all the time. He knows it and is ashamed of it, but he don't seem to have strength enough to break away from it. It's too bad."

"Yes, it is," agreed Mr. Schofield. "What I hate about it most is the humiliation his daughter must suffer. I don't know whether you knew her or not — Betty Heywood — but she was a mighty nice girl."

"No, I didn't know her," said Mr. Round. "But she seems to have saved herself. I heard the other day that she was going to get married."

A BUBBLE BURSTS

Allan's heart bounded suddenly, and his face reddened, but neither of his companions noticed his agitation.

"That's a good thing," said Mr. Schofield. "Who's the man?"

"I don't remember his name," answered Mr. Round. "I heard some of the boys talking about it the other day — of course there may be nothing in it."

"Well, I hope it's so," remarked the other. "It would solve a mighty unpleasant situation. Now, I'm going to turn you loose for the afternoon, Allan," he added. "Meet me in time to catch Number Two and we'll have dinner together on the diner."

"Very well, sir," said Allan, welcoming the opportunity to be alone with his thoughts. "I'll be there."

He walked slowly up the street, seeing nothing of the busy life about him, turning over and over in his mind the bit of gossip which Mr. Round had repeated. Could it be true, he wondered. Suppose it were, what would it mean to him? It had been years since he had seen Betty Heywood; it was very probable that the girl whose image lived in his heart was very different from the reality. At any rate, it was absurd to suppose that she would have anything more than the faintest of remembrances of the boy she had befriended in years gone by.

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Shaking such thoughts away, at last, he considered for a moment where he should spend the afternoon. He decided in favour of the Art Museum, and boarding a car, started on the long, beautiful ride to Eden Park. The route carried him up one of the long inclines, which are a unique feature of Cincinnati's street railway system. The city proper is built in the valley along the river, and is surrounded by hills two or three hundred feet in height, where the most exclusive residence sections are. These are reached by inclines, where the cars are hoisted and lowered by means of massive wire cables.

As the car rose slowly up the incline, Cincinnati lay spread below him, a charming city, marred only by the haze of coal smoke which a too-indulgent city government made little effort to suppress. Half an hour later, he was at his destination and entered the museum, whose collection of paintings, statuary and other works of art is one of the most famous in the middle west. He spent a most enjoyable hour wandering from room to room, and was about ready to go, when, in one of the far galleries, he noticed a woman at work before an easel, and, strolling nearer, saw that she was making a copy of one of the larger paintings. He was about to turn away, fearing that he was intruding, when she glanced up and saw him.

"Why, Allan West," she cried, and started up, hand out-stretched, and he saw that it was Betty

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Heywood. "It is Allan West, isn't it?" she asked, as he stood for an instant chained to the spot.

"It certainly is," he answered, clasping the welcoming hand. "But I didn't expect to see you here."

"Nor I to see you," she broke in. "What has a train-dispatcher to do with picture galleries?"

"Mighty little, I'm sorry to say. I didn't know you were an artist!"

"I'm not," she said, laughing merrily. "I'm only a copyist. What do you think of it?" she added, with a gesture toward the picture on the easel.

Allan gazed at it with unfeigned admiration, though to a more critical eye, its shortcomings would have been evident enough.

"It's fine," he said. "It's splendid! Where did you learn how?"

Again she laughed, though her cheeks flushed a little at his praise.

"I've been working at it for a long time," she said. "But don't deceive yourself — it isn't a work of art — it's merely a pot-boiler."

"A what?"

"A pot-boiler — designed, in other words, not for fame, but to furnish food and raiment. But, come," she added, "I've worked enough for one day and I need some fresh air. Will you come along?"

"I certainly will!" he said, his face lighting, and

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he watched her while she stowed her paints away in a box, giving them, together with the easel and the unfinished painting, into the care of one of the attendants.

"Now wait till I get my hat and coat," she said, "and off we go."

She was back in a few moments, her piquant face set off by a most becoming toque, and her painting apron replaced by a long wrap.

"All right," she said, and a moment later they were walking down the steps together.

Not till then did he have an opportunity to look at her, and he was struck with a sudden sense of strangeness. This was not the Betty Heywood he had known, but a woman brighter, more dashing, more self-assured. He was surprised, in a way, to find that there was no shadow of her father's failure on her. He had expected to find her labouring with that sorrow, or at least showing visible traces of it, and he wondered how she had escaped so completely.

She glanced at him once or twice, as they turned together along one of the paths of the park, and opened her lips to speak, but closed them again, as though hesitating how to begin.

"You're still at Wadsworth?" she asked, at last.

"Oh, yes."

"In the dispatchers' office?"

"Chief dispatcher now," he said.

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"Are you?" she said. "Isn't that fine! But I knew you'd work your way right up. Do you know, you've developed into just the sort of man that you were a boy."

"Doesn't everybody?"

"Oh, no indeed. Very few people do. Most of us grow crooked — there's always something in the path that throws us out of line. Sometimes it throws us up and sometimes it throws us down, but you've grown right straight ahead. Now I can tell by the way you look at me that I'm not at all the kind of woman you expected I would be."

He was a little disconcerted at this frankness.

"No," he said, at last, "you're right there. I can't quite make you out."

"I've had obstacles, you see," she said, her face clouding for an instant. "I've grown crooked."

"I heard of your mother's death," he said, gently. "I shall never forget her, though I met her only once."

"Yes — dear mother. She thought a great deal of you. So did father."

"Your father was very kind to me," he said.

She looked quickly into his face.

"Things have not been well with us," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "I had to go to work. I found I had some little artistic talent, and I turned it to account. And I've made a lot of good friends here."

She looked at him again.

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"You've heard that I'm going to be married?" she asked, suddenly.

"Yes," he answered, as evenly as he could. "Mr. Round said something about it to-day."

"It's going to be next month. His name's Knowlton — Robert Underwood Knowlton — he's a lawyer, and the dearest fellow that ever was. I wish you could meet him. I know you'd like him," she went on, rapidly. Then she stopped suddenly and looked at him.

"See here, Allan," she said, her hand on his arm. "Don't look like that. It's not I you're in love with — you're not in love with anybody. You never have been with me. You happened to meet me when you were lonely, and you gave me a little niche in your heart. But you don't love me — that's not what love is. I'm not at all the kind of woman you imagined — you've seen that already. Now you mustn't be foolish — shake hands, like a brother."

He looked down into her face, and suddenly it seemed as though a veil were swept away, and he saw that she was right. It wasn't love he felt for her — it was only affection. Her eyes, watching him anxiously, brightened as she saw the change in his face.

"You're the dearest girl that ever was," he said, clasping her hand, "and the bravest. I'm not sure that I'm not falling in love with you now."

"No, you're not!" she cried, patting him on the

A BUBBLE BURSTS

arm. "I knew I was right!" she added, her face beaming. "You've made me so happy — for I couldn't help worrying a little, sometimes. Will you come to the wedding, if I ask you?"

"Ask me and see," he retorted, laughing.

"Miss Elizabeth Heywood requests the favour of Mr. Allan West's attendance at her wedding, February 16th, at two o'clock P. M. R. S. V. P."

"Mr. Allan West acknowledges the receipt of Miss Heywood's kind invitation and accepts with pleasure."

"Good!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Then you'll meet Bob and you'll see what a lucky girl I am."

"I think I'll be more apt to see what a lucky fellow he is."

"Well, we're both lucky, and we're going to be very, very happy."

"I hope you will," he said, heartily.

"Thank you, Allan; I know you do. And now here comes my car. Stop it for me. Good-bye," she added, as the car came to a stop opposite them. "And I can't tell you how glad I am I met you this afternoon. Good-bye!"

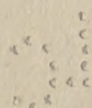
She waved her hand to him from the platform, and was gone.

He stood for a moment, watching the car, then turned slowly back toward the museum. He, also, was glad that he had met Betty Heywood — glad that she had been brave enough and clear-sighted

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enough to set him right with her and with the world.

And yet he realized dimly that there was suddenly a place vacant in his heart.



CHAPTER X

IN THE SWITCH TOWER

WITHOUT pausing at the museum, Allan boarded a car back to the city. After all, he reflected, Betty Heywood was right — train-dispatching had little to do with art and artists. He realized that he had looked at the paintings and the statuary from the outside, as it were; he had been interested in them, it is true, as he would have been interested in a play or a novel. They had entertained him, they had helped him to pass a pleasant hour, and that was all. He did not feel that they were vital to him — vital in the sense that a thorough knowledge of railroading was.

In a word, he was narrowing into a specialist, as every man who really accomplishes anything in the world must do. His work had become the only really necessary and vital thing to him. He had found his groove, and while he still possessed the power to climb out of his groove occasionally and to look about the world and find amusement in it, it was in his groove that he felt most at home, that he was strongest and most efficient and most con-

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tented. For his efficiency — the knowledge that he was really doing something in the world — rejoiced him and moved him to stronger effort.

So his feet naturally led him back to the great depot which formed the Union terminal for all the lines of railroad entering Cincinnati. It was a place which might well be interesting to any one, so crowded was it with life and well-directed skill. To any one looking at it understandingly it was more than interesting. It was engrossing. Nowhere else did the life-blood of traffic pulse quite so strongly; nowhere else was there quite such an opportunity to study human nature; and nowhere else was perfection of organization in railroading so necessary and so evident.

It was this latter point which interested Allan most of all, and so, with merely a fleeting glance at the crowds hurrying past him, he bent his steps along one of the narrow cement platforms which ran out under the train-shed like long, gray fingers. In the midst of the tangle of tracks just beyond the train-shed, stood a tall, box-like structure, its upper story entirely enclosed in glass. Dodging an outgoing train, Allan hastened toward this queer tower, climbed the narrow stair which led to its upper story, opened the door and looked in.

"Hello, Jim," he said, to a man in shirt-sleeves who stood looking down upon the busy yards. "May I come in?"

The man turned quickly and held out his hand.

IN THE SWITCH TOWER

"Sure, Mr. West," he said. "Come in and sit down," and he motioned toward a chair.

Just then a bell overhead rang sharply.

"That's the Pennsylvania limited," he said. "Give her track number twelve, Sam."

There were two other shirt-sleeved men in the little room, standing before a long board from which projected what appeared to be a series of little handles like those one sees on water-cocks. At the words, one of the men turned one of these little handles.

Again the bell rang.

"Number seventeen for the accommodation," said the man Allan had addressed as Jim, and another little handle was turned, while still a third, which had been turned, sprang back to its original position.

"There goes that school-teachers' special from eleven," added Jim. "Fix her, Nick," and the third man turned a handle at his end of the board.

Allan, meanwhile, had taken a seat, and gazed down over the network of tracks. Trains were arriving and departing almost every minute. Busy little yard-engines were hustling strings of coaches about, pulling them out from under the great train-shed or backing them up into it. Down the long cement walks beneath the shed, arriving and departing passengers were hurrying to and fro; trucks piled high with luggage or groaning under a load of mail-sacks or express matter were being

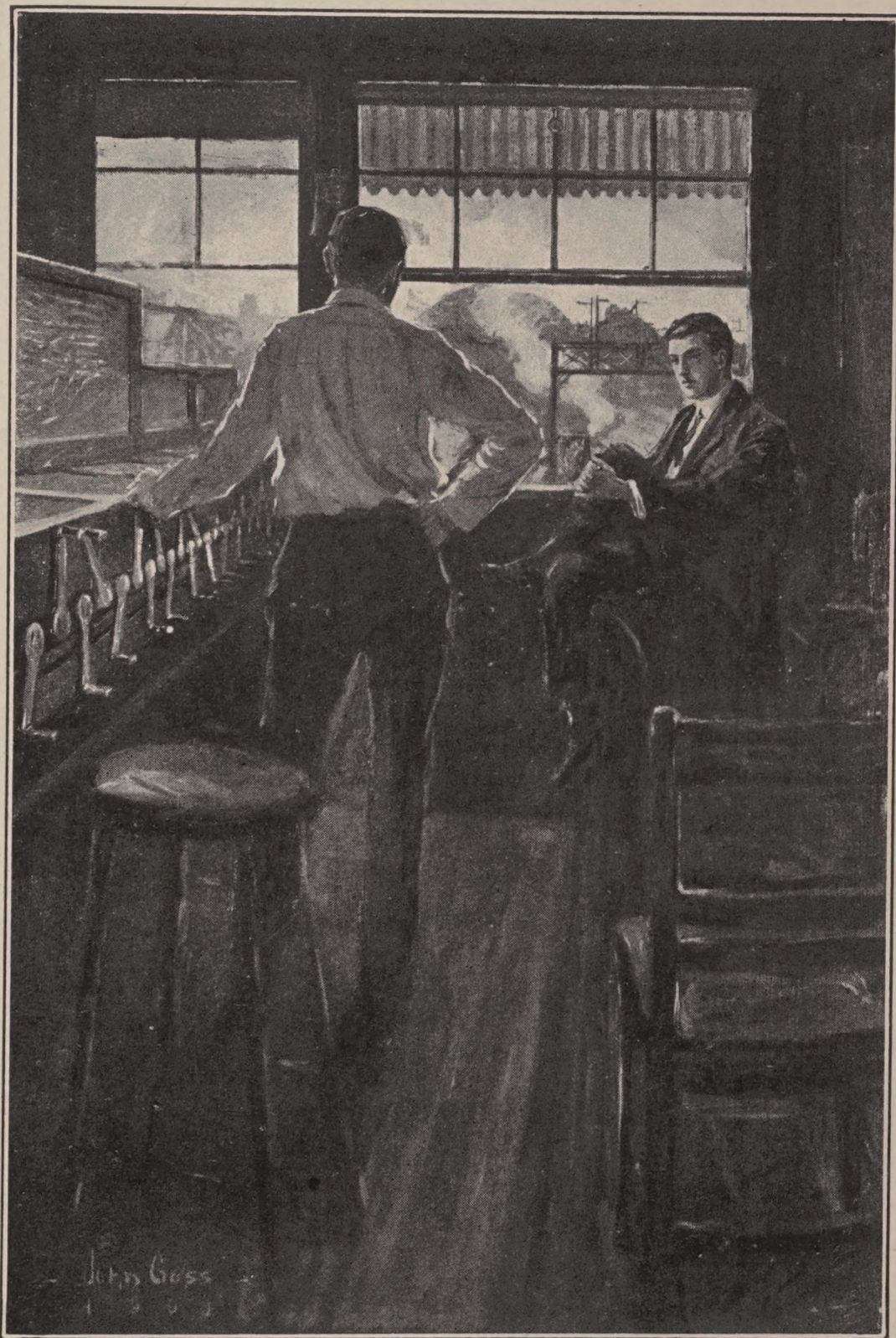
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propelled back and forth with almost superhuman skill; engineers were "oiling round," blue-coated conductors were reading their orders, hostlers with flaring torches were taking a last look at wheels and connections — in a word, the busy life of a great terminal was at full blast.

And above it all, controlling it, as it were, by a movement of a finger, stood Jim — James Anderson Davis, if you care for his full name — gazing down upon it nonchalantly, and giving a terse order now and then. For Jim is the chief towerman, than whom, in his sphere, no autocrat is more autocratic and no czar more absolute.

It is a fearful and wonderful thing, this controlling the trains that arrive at and depart from a great terminal — almost too fearful and wonderful to be put upon paper. But at least we will make the effort.

Most modern terminals resemble each other in general plan. Railroads have found it not only convenient for the public but economical for themselves to build "union stations" in the larger cities, wherever possible. That is, a suitable site is selected, as near the business centre of the city as it is possible to get, and the roads join together in providing the money necessary to purchase it and erect the station building, the cost being pro-rated in proportion to the amount of traffic which each road gets from the station.



“CONTROLLING IT, AS IT WERE, BY A MOVEMENT OF A
FINGER, STOOD JIM.”

IN THE SWITCH TOWER

The side fronting upon the street is usually handsomely embellished, for it is this side which the public sees as it approaches, and all railroads know that to make a good impression is to do good advertising. So with the main waiting-room, which always lies directly behind the street doors. Here marble, mosaic and gilding are always in evidence and no opportunity is lost to impress the travelling public with the wealth and magnificence of the road which it is using. On either side of the main waiting-room are smaller waiting- and retiring-rooms, there is a row of ticket-booths, a news-stand, telephone booths, baggage-rooms, a dining- and lunch-room and, of course, inevitably, the long rows of seats, back to back, where the waiting public spends so many weary minutes.

In the stories overhead are the executive offices of the various roads — as many of them as there is room for — but to these the general public seldom penetrates.

Beyond the swinging doors along the side of the waiting-room opposite the entrance is the main platform or concourse, and from it, stretching down between the tracks like long fingers, are the narrow cement platforms upon which the passengers alight or from which they mount to their trains. The tracks are laid in pairs, and a platform extends between every pair, each platform thus serving two tracks, one on either side. Overhead is the great echoing vault of the train-shed with its mighty ribs

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of steel, stretching in one enormous arc across the tracks beneath — a marvel of engineering skill, if not of architectural beauty.

This is what is known as the head-house plan, and is the ideal one for the passenger, since it permits him to go to and from his train without crossing any tracks or climbing to any overhead bridges. It is, however, expensive for the railroads since, of course, all through trains must be backed out and switched around until they are headed on their way again — a process which requires no little expenditure of time and energy, as well as money. However, in a great city, a right-of-way which would enable the through trains to continue straight onward toward their destination is frequently so expensive that it is cheaper to back them out the way they came in, and send them by a detour around the city.

And upon no one is this backing-out process more wearing than on the tower-man, for the trains must be handled twice over the same track, and of course the track must be kept clear until the train is out again and safely on its way. Now there is never any surplusage of tracks in a terminal. Indeed, as one sees the tracks narrow and narrow as the terminal is approached, until they are merged into those which plunge beneath the train-shed, one is apt to think they are all too few. Yet their number has been calculated with the greatest care; there is not one more than is needed by the nicest econ-

IN THE SWITCH TOWER

omy of operation — nor one less. The number is just right for the station's needs — so long as the towerman knows his business and keeps his head.

And now to return to the glass-enclosed perch where, for eight hours of every day, Jim Davis and his two assistants send the trains in and out over the network of tracks. That long row of little handles is the last word in switch-control. Time was — and is, in all but the most important stations — when the towerman opened or closed the yard-switches by means of great levers. To throw one of these levers was no small athletic feat, especially if the switch it controlled was at some distance, and to keep at it eight hours at a time reduced the strongest man to mental and physical exhaustion. When the towerman left his work at the end of his trick, he was, in the expressive parlance of the day, "all in." Now when men are "all in," they are very apt to make mistakes, hence in a busy terminal under the old system, accidents more or less serious were of almost every-day occurrence. Besides which, the number of levers which one man was physically able to operate was comparatively small, so that there must be many men and a consequent divided responsibility and opportunity for confusion.

The tower itself had been an evolution, for, at first, these yard-switches had been controlled by a brigade of switchmen, each of whom had two or three under his supervision, which he turned by

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hand whenever he saw a train coming his way. Then the hand switchmen were supplanted by a cluster of levers in a tower, operated by a single man. The tower was so located that its occupant had a general view of the yards, and the levers were connected by steel rods with the switches and signals which protected them. For every switch must have its signal — that is, a device by which the engineer of the approaching train may see whether the switch is properly set — the old standards showing yellow when the switch was open and red when it was closed — and since replaced by arms, or semaphores, which hang down when the train may pass and bar the way when it must stop.

This grouping of the levers in the tower simplified the control of the yard and placed the responsibility upon a more intelligent and more highly paid man than the average switchman, and consequently broadened the margin of safety. But terminals grew and yards grew and switches increased in number, until even this system was unable to meet the demands made upon it.

It was at a time when this state of affairs seemed seriously to threaten the safety of operation of great terminals that some genius invented the pneumatic control. Instead of a row of great levers requiring the strongest muscles, the towerman found himself confronting a battery of tiny ones, operated by the touch of a finger. And that finger-touch against the slender lever is instantly magni-

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fied to the pull of a giant arm against a switch half a mile or more away.

How? By a bewildering intricacy of cogs and valves, by the aid of the electric current and of compressed air, for, in order to perfect this mechanism, man has harnessed the whirlwind and the lightning. That finger-touch brings instantly an electric touch; the electric touch raises a valve which releases the compressed air from a cylinder into which it has been pumped; and the air thus withdrawn from the cylinder in the tower basement is also in the same instant withdrawn from a cylinder opposite the switchpoint, by means of a slender pipe which connects the two; and a plunger in the cylinder at the switch moves the switch-point and the signals which protect it.

That seems enough for any mere machine to do — but it does much more. For, by a series of interlocking devices, the switches are so controlled by each other that no signal for a train to proceed can be given until all the other switches over which the train will pass have been properly set and locked, nor can any switch be moved as long as any signal is displayed which gives right of way over it. Thus was the margin of safety further broadened, and the control of a great terminal brought down to three men on each eight hour trick, representing the very cream of their profession.

Approaching trains announce their coming by

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ringing an electric gong, the chief towerman, of course, knowing just which train is due at that particular instant — knowing, too, if any train is late, and how late and with what other trains it conflicts. He must know the precise second of departure of each train from the shed, and every train must glide smoothly in and out without let or hindrance. He must *know*; he mustn't merely think he knows, for this is one of the positions in which a man never has a chance to make two mistakes. For, while the tower machinery is wonderfully adapted to its purpose, it is, after all, the mind of the chief towerman which controls and directs it.

It was not by any means the first time that Allan West had sat watching this fascinating scene, but it had never grown uninteresting and he had never ceased to wonder at it.

"I used to think train-dispatching was a pretty nerve-racking business," he remarked, after a while, "but it's child's play compared with this."

"Well, I don't know," said Jim, his eyes on a through train threading its way cautiously out of the terminal and over the network of switches. "We don't have to worry about big accidents up here — the interlocking takes care of that. We can't have a head-end collision, for instance — at least, not while the signals are working properly. What we've got to look out for is tangles. If we have to hold one train two or three minutes, that

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means that two or three other trains will be held up, and before you know it, you've got a block ten miles long. Then's when somebody up here has to do some tall thinking and do it quick. The only way to keep things straight is to keep 'em moving. Sixteen," he added to his assistants, as the overhead bell rang.

They watched the train as it rolled in, saw it disgorge its load of passengers, saw the baggage and express and mail matter hustled off, saw the yard-engine back up and couple on to the rear coach, and slowly drag the train out from under the train-shed.

"I never watch that done," added Jim, as the train disappeared down the yards, "but what my heart gets right up in my throat. You don't know what a way those pesky little yard-engines have of jumping switches. Open sixteen, Sam," he added, as the big engine which had brought the train in rolled sedately down the yards on the way to the round-house, to be washed out and raked down and coaled up. "Ring off thirteen, Nick," he said, and Nick touches one of the little handles, a blade on a signal bridge opposite the end of the train-shed drops, there is a sharp puff, puff, of a locomotive, and another train starts slowly from the train-shed on its journey east or west, north or south, as the case may be.

Meanwhile, the little switch-engine has set its train of coaches in upon one of the innumerable

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sidings away down the yards where passenger cars are stored — and one would scarcely believe how many miles of such storage track every great terminal requires — has uncoupled and started back toward the train-shed for another load — her movements, by the way, as well known to and thoroughly understood by the chief towerman as are those of the most glittering thorough train. Already the train of coaches is in the hands of the cleaners and stockers, for it will start out again presently upon another trip. Modern passenger cars represent too much money to be allowed to repose on a siding a minute longer than necessary.

The cleaners swarm into the coaches, dusty and dirty and foul after the long journey, dragging behind them long lines of hose. The hose carries compressed air, and in half an hour those cars are sucked clean of dirt and are as fresh and sweet as when they first came from the shops. Other cleaners are washing the windows and polishing the metal fittings. Trucks pull up loaded with ice, with clean linen, and the stockers see that every car is supplied. Farther along is the diner, and to it come the butcher's cart, the baker's cart, the grocer's cart; dozens and dozens of napkins and table-cloths are taken aboard, and already the chef is making out the menu for the dinner which will be served in an hour or two somewhere out on the road. It is all wonderful — fearful and wonderful, when one stops to think of it — impossible to set on paper

IN THE SWITCH TOWER

except in broad suggestive splashes, as an impressionist paints a sunset.

"Are you going back on Two?" asked Jim.

"Yes," said Allan, glancing at the tower clock.

"Well, there she comes," said Jim, and motioned toward a cut of coaches being backed into the trainshed by one of the ever-present switch-engines.

"All right," said Allan. "I'll go down and hunt up Mr. Schofield. He's going back with me. This is a great place, Jim."

"Come again," said Jim heartily. "You're always welcome. He's a fine young fellow," he continued, as Allan went down the stairs. "He'll have his office up yonder one of these days," and he motioned toward the towering stories of the terminal building. "Number eight, Sam," he added, as the bell rang. "There comes the St. Louis express."

CHAPTER XI

ALLAN'S EYES ARE OPENED

THE return trip to Wadsworth was accomplished without incident, and, bidding Mr. Schofield good-bye, Allan ran up to his office to assure himself that everything was all right, and then, after writing a necessary order or two, turned his steps homeward. The night was still and clear and it seemed to him that his steps rang on the pavement more loudly than usual. Certainly, as they turned in at the gate, they must have been heard within the Welsh home, for a moment later, the front door was opened and Mamie stood there, light in hand, to welcome him.

Allan looked at her smiling down at him, with a strange little stirring of the heart. She had grown up almost without his noticing it; he had been so absorbed in his work that he had not seen the change from girlhood into young maidenhood. He knew, of course, that she had progressed through the graded schools and at last, triumphantly, through the High school; he knew, when he stopped to think of it, that she would soon be seventeen; but she had continued, to all intents

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and purposes, the child he had snatched from death in the first days of their meeting. Now, somehow, all that was changed, and he gazed up into her face, seeing clearly, for the first time, what a winsome face it was.

"So you're back!" she cried, standing aside that he might enter. "But I heard Number Two whistle in half an hour ago."

"Yes," said Allan. "I had a little work to do before I could come home. Do you know, Mamie," he added, pausing beside her in the little hall, and looking down at her, "I'd never noticed before what a pretty young woman you've been growing into."

The colour in Mamie's cheeks deepened a little, but the blue eyes lifted to his did not waver, nor was there a trace of self-consciousness in her laugh.

"Look at these freckles," she cried, her finger on them.

"Beauty spots!"

"And this pug nose."

"A love of a nose!"

"And this big mouth."

"I should like to kiss it," he said, and then stopped with a sudden burning consciousness that the words should not have been uttered. "Forgive me, Mamie," he said, quickly. "I didn't mean that — or, rather, I did mean it, but I shouldn't have said it."

"Why shouldn't you have said it?" she in-

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quired, seriously, looking up at him with a little pucker of perplexity in her forehead. "Why shouldn't you kiss me, if you like?"

He trembled a little before this trusting innocence, and searched around in his mind somewhat miserably for a reply.

"I don't quite know," he answered, at last. "I'll think it over. But you'll freeze to death here, with no wrap on," and without looking at her, he led the way into the sitting room beyond.

Mamie followed him, and, placing the lamp upon a table, sat down thoughtfully before the fire.

"So you're back, Allan?" said Jack, laying aside the local evening paper, which he had been reading aloud to Mary.

"And hungry, too," added Mary, hastily rolling her knitting into a ball. "I'll have ye a snack in a minute, Allan."

"No you won't," retorted Allan, placing his hands on her shoulders and holding her in her chair as she started to rise. "I had dinner in the diner with Mr. Schofield, and really ate more than I should. I'm not the least hungry."

And feeling Mary subside under his hands, he released her and sat down.

"What's the news?" he added, turning to Jack.

"Oh, nothin' much," replied the latter. "I've heard a good deal of talk to-day about that court decision on the employers' liability act. One section-man dropped a heavy tie on another section-

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man — an' the feller that was hurt sued the railroad under the law. Now the court holds that the law don't apply, and some of the boys are sayin' that nothin' that helps the labourin' man ever does apply when it gits up to the supreme court."

"Yes — I've heard of the case," said Allan. "But look here, Jack — do you think the road ought to be made to pay, because one of its men injures another through carelessness? It wasn't the road injured him. Suppose you hired two men to build a chimney and one of them let a brick fall on the other and killed him. Would you think you were to blame, or that you ought to pay damages?"

"No," said Jack. "Sure not. But somehow a case against a corporation looks different to most people."

"I know it does," agreed Allan. "And there are a lot of people who wouldn't steal from an individual who don't hesitate to steal from a corporation. It's a queer state of public morals. But who was doing the talking?"

"Well," said Jack, "most of it was done by a big fellow with a black moustache named Nixon. Somebody said he'd come on to make the road take Rafe Bassett back."

The disgust in his voice told how unfavourably he considered such a proposition.

"Well, don't you be afraid," said Allan, "the road won't take him back."

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"I'm glad to hear it. I know Rafe Bassett — he's low down trash — he's always got a hammer out fer somebody. I never did understand how he got the pull he's got with his lodge."

"Well, he'll need a pull before he gets through this," said Allan, "but let's talk about something else, Jack. Oh," he added, suddenly, "who do you think I saw in Cincinnati to-day? I had the afternoon to myself and I went out to the Art Museum — and there, painting a picture, sat Betty Heywood."

A sudden wave of colour flooded Mamie's face, but no one saw it.

"Paintin' a picture?" repeated Mrs. Welsh. "Is she a painter?"

"Yes, and a mighty good one, so far as I was able to judge, though she laughed at me and said she wasn't. She seemed glad to see me and we took a little walk together."

He paused a moment, for there was an unaccountable difficulty, somehow, in telling what he had to tell. Mamie's eyes were on his face, and she was deadly pale.

"She told me about her work," he went on. "She said she'd had to do something for a living, and had done well with her paintings. I should think she would."

"Had to do something for a livin'?" echoed Mrs. Welsh. "Where's her father?"

"He's going down grade," answered Allan, so-

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berly, and told what he had heard of Mr. Heywood's dissipation.

"I'm mighty sorry t' hear that," remarked Jack, when Allan had finished. "Mr. Heywood was a good man an' a square man. I've seen better superintendents — we've got a better one now — but, all the same, I liked Mr. Heywood."

"So did I," said Allan. "I wish something could be done."

Jack shook his head.

"When drink gits its grip on a man as old as him," he said, "they ain't much hope."

"Thank goodness his wife's dead," added Mrs. Welsh. "It's the wife that it's allers the hardest on."

"It's hard enough on the daughter," broke in Mamie, softly.

"Well, she won't have to stand it much longer," said Allan, seizing the opening Mamie's remark gave him. "She's going to be married next month."

Mamie gave a quick gasp, which she tried to change into a cough, and bent again toward the fire, hiding her throbbing face in her hands.

Mary was staring at Allan, as though scarcely able to believe her ears.

"Married?" she repeated. "Who to? Allan, do you mean —"

"She's going to marry a young lawyer named Knowlton," broke in Allan, evenly. "It's to be on the sixteenth, and she asked me to come."

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Mary bent again to her knitting, with a sort of hiss that sounded suspiciously like "the hussy."

"She seems to be very happy over it," Allan went on, anxious that these dear friends should understand, and yet fearing to say too much. "She's a splendid girl, and beautiful as ever; but she's changed, too. She's not the same girl I used to know." Mamie was looking at him now, with intense eyes. So was Mrs. Welsh. "She saw it in my face, somehow, and we laughed over it."

"Well," said Jack, heavily, "I used t' think you was kind o' sweet on her yerself, Allan."

"I thought so, too," answered Allan, smiling. "But I guess it was just girls in general — you know she was about the only one I ever met. I'm mighty glad she's going to be happy. I'm going to the wedding. Why, where's Mamie?" he added, looking around at the sound of a softly closed door. "She not going to bed already?"

"Already!" echoed Mrs. Welsh. "Do you know it's after eleven o'clock? Time everyone of us was a-bed. Come, now, off wid ye!"

Allan laughed and arose, stretching himself lazily.

"I hadn't any idea it was so late," he said. "Good-night," and he mounted to his room.

He went immediately to bed — but not to sleep. The events of the day had been many and interesting. He closed his eyes, and called up again the minutes he had passed with Betty Heywood —

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he heard her voice, he saw her face — but somehow another face kept slipping in between — a face with a freckled, tip-tilted nose, and tender, sympathetic mouth. Something within him seemed to warm and gladden, and he dropped off to sleep, at last, with a smile upon his lips.

CHAPTER XII

THE INTERVIEW WITH NIXON

SUPERINTENDENT SCHOFIELD was at his desk bright and early next morning, for the purpose of getting out of the way the thirty-six hours' accumulation of routine business, before the approaching momentous interview with Nixon. Only one familiar with the executive offices of a railroad has any idea of the immense amount of correspondence, — reports, complaints, requests for information and instructions — which that stretch of time can accumulate, but the superintendent waded into the pile of letters and telegrams with a rapidity born of long practice, and when he finally leaned back in his chair, with a sigh of relief, it wanted still some minutes of nine o'clock.

"That's all, Joe," he said, to the stenographer, and that young man gathered up the letters, closed his note-book, and left the room.

Mr. Schofield swung around in his chair and stared down over the yards, his forehead wrinkled thoughtfully.

He and Mr. Round had, the afternoon before,

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gone over carefully every detail of the approaching interview, and yet it was very possible that some trivial incident might spoil it all. Most unpleasant of all loomed the possibility that he had been mistaken in his estimate of Nixon. Perhaps the man would not take a bribe — perhaps he was honest. Should that prove to be the case, any such attempt as Mr. Schofield was about to undertake could not but result most unpleasantly to himself and to the railroad. He could already see the newspaper headlines which would announce it — for the press of the country had, as a rule, followed the crowd and joined in the yelp at the heels of the “conscienceless corporations.”

ATTEMPT TO BRIBE!

Schofield, of the P. & O., Gives Convincing
Evidence of Corporation Methods

Offers Special Delegate Nixon a Thousand
Dollars to Betray His
Trust

Believes All Men May be Bought, but
Is Shown that Labour Is Unpur-
chasable — Grand Jury to
Investigate

He realized that he must feel his way with the utmost caution, and yet as he recalled Nixon's words, and the significant glance which accom-

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panied them, he could not believe that he had been mistaken. But the man was adroit and suspicious — a single false movement and he would be on his guard.

A tap at the door interrupted his thoughts.

“Come in,” he called, and an instant later, the door opened and Nixon entered the room.

“On time, I see,” said Mr. Schofield, pleasantly, and motioned his visitor to a chair.

“Yes,” said Nixon, taking off his luxurious overcoat and sitting down, “I make it a point to be on time for little conferences like this. The boys were inclined to get mad,” he went on, “because I gave you two days to make up your mind. But I told them there wasn’t nothing to gain by hurryin’ a thing like this. I told them I wanted to give you a fair show. That’s me. I allers give everybody a fair show.”

Nixon was, at bottom, coarse and uneducated, and this coarseness and ignorance would crop up in his talk at times, in spite of his efforts to suppress them. Since his promotion to a high place in the brotherhood, he had studied incessantly how best to make himself a “gentleman.” Unfortunately, his conception of the meaning of that word was modelled upon the demeanour of barbers, bartenders and hotel-clerks. He believed a diamond scarf-pin and a seal-ring to be indispensable portions of a gentleman’s attire, together with a shirt striped in loud colours, glazed shoes, a fancy waistcoat,

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and a trace of perfume. He also believed that a gentleman invariably wore his hat cocked over one eye, to prove himself a knowing fellow and man of the world. He had laboured with the utmost diligence to form himself upon this model and was entirely satisfied with the result. That he was not a gentleman, and that anyone who met him would not so consider him, never for an instant entered his mind.

"Yes," he repeated, "I insisted that you be given a fair show, and finally they saw that I was right. I don't believe in no snap judgments. I heard that you was down to Cincinnati yesterday and saw Round."

It may be added that another point in Nixon's conception of gentlemanly conduct was that he should call men in exalted positions by their last names to show his sense of equality, or by their first names to prove his easy familiarity with them.

"Yes," said Mr. Schofield, "Mr. Round and I had a conference about the matter."

"Well," demanded Nixon, gazing at him from under lowered lids, "what's the answer?"

"We won't reinstate Bassett," answered Mr. Schofield, quietly.

"Then, by God, it's fight!" cried Nixon, his face turning purple, and he brought his fist down on the desk with a crash. "Do you realize what all this is going to cost you?"

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"Tell me," suggested Mr. Schofield. "And don't hit my desk again like that. Some of my men might think there was a fight, and come in. We don't want any intruders."

"No," agreed Nixon, "we don't," and he glanced sharply about the room. Then he hitched his chair closer to the desk and leaned forward in his earnestness. "This thing'll cost you a hundred thousand dollars before you've done with it, and no end of trouble. I've been lookin' over the field, and I know. First, I'll call off the engineers."

"We'll replace them," said Mr. Schofield, promptly.

"You'll try to," corrected Nixon, "but it won't be so easy as you think. Good engineers ain't knock-in' around the country lookin' fer scab jobs — you know that as well as I do. The good men are all in the brotherhood. All you'll find is a few dubs who can run an engine after a fashion and who don't belong to the brotherhood or have been kicked out — they'll soon play hob with your engines."

"No doubt they're pretty bad if they've been kicked out," observed Mr. Schofield.

"But," continued Nixon, impressively, paying no heed to the interruption, "the minute this scab engineer climbs up into the cab, that same minute the fireman will climb down. More than that, no union conductor or brakeman will help run a train which a scab engineer is driving, no union switch-

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man will throw a target for it, and no union operator will give it orders. So there you are — fire Bassett, and you'll need mighty soon not only a new outfit of engineers, but of firemen, conductors, brakemen, switchmen and operators. Maybe you think it'll be easy to find new men to take their places, but I don't."

"I don't either," agreed Mr. Schofield; "but just the same we won't give up the fight before it begins."

"Well, your lines are bound to be tied up more or less, even at the best," said Nixon, "and right in the busy season, too. That will mean considerable of a loss."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Schofield, "it will."

"And some of the loss will be permanent. When traffic is turned aside that way, if only for a short time, some of it always stays turned aside. After you git things straightened out, you'll have to git out and hustle for business, or your earnings will show a permanent decrease."

"I know that too," said Mr. Schofield.

"And there's another thing to consider," went on Nixon, impressively. "Union men are orderly and law-abiding. All they will do is to quit their jobs and let you run the road if you can. They won't interfere with you — they never do."

"So I have heard," said Mr. Schofield, with a grim smile. "Surely it's no use repeating that fairy tale to me."

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"It's no fairy tale," protested Nixon, earnestly, but there was a sardonic light in his eyes. "As I said, union men never make trouble. But there's always a lot of sympathizers and hangers-on who try to help, and who always do make trouble, however hard the union men may try to prevent it."

"I don't think the union men will lose any sleep trying to stop it."

"Yes, they will," contradicted Nixon, "but they won't be able to. Wind of this trouble has got about, you know; and just last night, as I was passing a saloon over here, I heard two or three fellers talkin' and one of them remarked what a beautiful big blaze the stockyards would make and how easy it would be to start."

"Is this a threat?" asked Mr. Schofield, looking fixedly at his visitor.

"A threat? Oh, dear, no; I'm simply telling you what I heard — I want you to know what kind of trouble it is you're walkin' into. Of course, I stopped right away and told those fellers we union men wouldn't stand for nothing like that."

"Yes," commented Mr. Schofield, "I've got a picture of you stopping. Your righteous indignation is plainly apparent."

"Well, anyway," said Nixon, grinning, "there's no telling what'll happen if you decide to let this strike go on."

"I didn't say that we had decided to do that,"

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said Mr. Schofield, quietly. "I only said that we wouldn't reinstate Bassett," and he looked Nixon straight in the eye.

That individual sustained the gaze for a moment, his colour deepening a little; then he arose and made a deliberate circuit of the room, assuring himself that all the doors were tightly closed, and also glancing into the closet where the superintendent hung his hat and overcoat. The inspection finished, he returned to his chair, and produced two big black cigars, handing one to his companion and lighting the other.

"Thanks," said Mr. Schofield, taking the cigar with a little effort. He lighted it, took a puff or two, and then looked critically at its fat, black contour. "Good cigar," he commented.

Nixon laughed complacently.

"Yes, I'm kind o' pertick'ler about my tobacco," he said. "These is a private stock—I get 'em from a friend of mine. I'll send you over a couple of boxes."

"They're better cigars than I can afford to smoke," remarked the superintendent. "The job of special delegate must pay pretty well."

Nixon laughed again.

"Oh, so, so," he said, and tilting his chair back, rammed his hands deep in his trousers' pockets.

"How long have you held it?"

"Three years—an' there's never been a breath of complaint against me. If any man stands square

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with the brotherhood, it's me," and again Nixon grinned sardonically.

Mr. Schofield's last trace of uncertainty had vanished. He knew his ground now and could advance more surely.

"No," he went on, slowly, "we won't reinstate Bassett, and at the same time we're going to avoid a strike, if we can. I think you remarked the other day that there would be no strike unless you called it."

"There won't," said Nixon, briefly.

"What will happen, then?"

"I'll make a report adverse to Bassett and he'll be kicked out of the brotherhood?"

"Won't he make a howl?"

"Let him. What good will it do? My report goes."

Mr. Schofield nodded, as he watched the cigar smoke float slowly upward.

"I see," he commented, and there was a moment's silence. "Suppose," he went on, at last, "that you were convinced that it was your duty to make such a report, what assurance would we have that you would really make it?"

"You'd have to take my word," said Nixon. "You could count on me making the report, all right, if I was properly convinced."

"And I suppose," continued Mr. Schofield, "that you would have to be — ah — convinced in advance."

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This was a new experience for him and he was considerably the more confused of the two.

"Sure thing," answered Nixon, bluntly.

"Well, I'll see if I can convince you. Bassett was drunk, he was insolent to his superior officer; to reinstate him would mean the end of discipline on this line. His offence falls clearly under rule forty-three, which says that no employee of the road, on duty or off, shall frequent saloons. In violating that rule, he laid himself liable to discharge and discharged he was. He also violated rule sixty-one, which says that insolence to a superior officer may be punished by dismissal, at the discretion of the train master. The train master exercised his discretion and dismissed him. When Bassett was employed by the road he was given a copy of the rules and knew that he must obey them if he wanted to hold his job. He disobeyed them, and lost it — so he's got nobody to blame but himself. That's our position. Don't you think it's a pretty strong one?"

"Yes," agreed Nixon, slowly, "it looks pretty strong," but he was plainly waiting for something that was still to come.

"By the way," continued Mr. Schofield, opening a drawer of his desk. "After you left the other day, I found this package on the floor," and he took from the drawer a little packet, carefully wrapped and sealed, and laid it on his desk. "It

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doesn't belong to anyone around here, and I thought maybe you'd dropped it."

"Let's see it," said Nixon, and took it with eager fingers. He ripped open the seal and drew out a little bundle of paper currency. He ran through it rapidly and found it to consist of ten one hundred dollar bills. "Yes," he said, slipping them into an inside pocket. "It's mine. I'd been wondering what had become of it."

"And you're convinced?"

"Perfectly, I'll report against Bassett."

"When?"

Nixon glanced at his watch and started to his feet.

"Right away," he said. "The meeting's called for ten-thirty. I'll just have time to get there."

He picked up hat and overcoat and started for the door. Mr. Schofield, his finger hovering over an electric button, watched him with a perplexed pucker of the forehead. Then his face cleared, and he took his hand away from the button.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "I'm glad we could settle it so easily."

"Oh, nobody never has no trouble with me," said Nixon, "if they talk business," and he opened the door and closed it after him.

Two men, who — so a single glance told him — were not railroad men, were standing just across the hall, looking out of a window. They glanced around, as he came out, but made no effort to

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molest him, and he hurried away, the packet in his inside pocket pressing against his breast with a most reassuring warmth.

And just as he disappeared down the stairs, the door of Mr. Schofield's room opened and the two strangers were called hastily inside.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. SCHOFIELD'S BOMBSHELL

THE meeting room of Scioto lodge, B. of L. E., was jammed to the doors. Every member who was off duty and who could by any possibility attend, was present. Many of them had come in from the road only a short time before, and in the ordinary course of things, would have gone home, got something to eat, and gone to bed; but the present crisis took the place of food and sleep, and its excitement robbed them of desire for either.

The meeting hall was on the third floor of a brick building only a short distance from the station. It was reached by two long flights of steep and narrow stairs, and was cold and scantily furnished and uninviting. At various points about the room, large arm chairs stood on little platforms, these being the stations for the officers of the lodge, when going through the intricacies of the ritual. Rows of smaller chairs were pushed back along the walls, there was a table or two — and that was all.

On this bright morning in late January, as has been said, the hall was crowded. A group had

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gathered around Bassett, who was declaiming excitedly.

"It's our chance," he was saying. "Now's the time t' show the road who's boss. You know well enough all the other orders'll stand by us, an' we'll tie the division up so tight it can't turn a wheel."

The younger men nodded emphatically, but a few of the older ones looked grave. They had been through strikes before, and knew that they did not always turn out as the strikers anticipated.

"I don't know," put in one of them, hesitatingly. "I don't believe we'll ever be able to boss the road. It don't look right. If you had a business, you'd want to run it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," flashed Bassett. "But I'd run it square."

"O' course; we kin do our best to make 'em run it square."

"Well, that's all we're tryin' to do now, ain't it?"

"Some o' you fellers seem to be hopin' there'll be a strike. Mebbe they'll reinstate Bassett."

"Mebbe they will," growled that worthy, "but I don't believe it. They ain't got manhood enough to do that."

In his heart, he knew that he had been wrong, and did not deserve reinstatement; but this consciousness of guilt interfered in no way with the bold face he turned to the world, and the loud voice in which he proclaimed his wrongs. And a bold face and loud voice often have great weight with

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the unthinking, who mistake them for the earmarks of innocence.

“Well, I hope they will,” said another of the older men, wistfully. “I ain’t in no sort o’ shape to stand a strike.”

“I ain’t either,” put in one of the younger men, boldly, “but that don’t make no difference. I’d ruther starve ’n work fer a company as wouldn’t do the right thing.”

“It’s all right to starve yourself,” rejoined the older man. “I used t’ feel that way, too; but when it comes t’ starvin’ yer family, it’s a different matter — mighty different.”

“Yes,” added another, “an’ when a feller’s built a house an’ is payin’ fer it in the Buildin’ an’ Loan, a strike don’t look good, neither. If a feller can’t make his payments, he loses his house, without any ifs or ands about it.”

“Pshaw!” put in the young fellow, easily. “The brotherhood’ll take care of you. You won’t starve nor lose your house, neither.”

“Mebbe not. But if I loses my job, a lot o’ good my house’ll do me, won’t it?”

“Lose yer job? How kin you do that?”

“Easy enough. I’ve seen — ”

But a sudden shout from the door interrupted him.

“Here’s Nixon! Here’s Nixon!”

And the great man was half-pushed, half-carried forward to the platform at the end of the room.

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He smiled about to those on the right and left of him, and finally mounted the platform and deliberately removed overcoat and hat. A close observer might have seen that he was very nervous, but he held himself well in hand. The truth is, Nixon had not anticipated so large an outpouring nor such intense interest in the case and in consequence, found the task confronting him considerably more difficult than he had thought it would be.

He took out his handkerchief and passed it over his moist moustache, for he had stopped in the saloon on the first floor to take a single "bracer," then he held up his hand impressively for silence. Nixon believed in doing a thing dramatically.

"Well, boys," he announced, "I've seen Schofield."

"What did he say?" shouted one of the men, impatient of Nixon's deliberate manner.

"Now, look here," yelled Nixon, searching the offender out with threatening forefinger, "I won't be interrupted — I won't! If another man does that, I leave — an' I'll let y' wait a week fer a letter from headquarters. You don't seem t' realize what it means fer a man like me t' come down here t' settle your rows."

"That's what you're paid fer," murmured one of the men, in a far corner, but he lowered his voice carefully.

"Schofield an' I went over the situation from

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a to izzard," Nixon continued, when quiet was restored, satisfied that there would be no further interruptions. "He gave me the case from the road's side, and I gave him the case from our side, and I can't deny that he had the best of me."

There was a little murmur at this, but Nixon stilled it instantly with raised finger.

"The fact of the matter is," he went on, raising his voice suddenly and glowering at Bassett, who occupied a place in the front line, "this man Bassett was drunk the other night, and every mother's son of you knows it."

"It's a lie!" yelled Bassett, white as death, and again there was a murmur, but again Nixon managed to still it.

"I'll answer *you*," he said, pointing to Bassett, "after this meetin' adjourns. I ain't here to argue. I'm here to state facts. This man was drunk an' insulted his superior officer. The road had a right to fire him on two counts — fer bein' drunk an' fer insubordination."

He paused an instant and glowered around. There had been a little movement at the door a few minutes before, and Mr. Schofield had stepped quietly inside, followed by the two men whom Nixon had seen standing in the hall outside the superintendent's office. But so intent was everyone on what Nixon was saying that no one observed them, and they stood watching the proceedings without question or interference.

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"Now, I'm going to give it to you fellers straight," continued Nixon. "You need it. You've been makin' a little tin god of this feller and he ain't worth it. Now my advice to you is, drop him. Kick him out. At any rate, the grand lodge won't back you up if you try to call a strike about this, and you know what that means. It means that your charter will be taken away from you and the lodge disbanded. The grand lodge will see every time that you get your rights, but it won't back you up when you're as clearly in the wrong as you are now. Why, to call a strike for a thing like that would be suicide. Let me tell you boys something — you'll never win any strike unless you have the public with you. If the public's against you, sooner or later you'll be going back to work like whipped curs — an' you'll be lucky if you kin get your old jobs. An' I guess that's all," he concluded, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

Then his eyes rested on three men who had been gradually working their way toward the stage, and he caught his breath sharply. But in an instant, by a mighty effort, he had recovered his self-control.

"Boys," he said, "here's Mr. Schofield himself. I'm glad he's with us. I want to say that I've found him a square man." There was a little flutter of applause at this, for most of them had themselves found him to be a square man. "We would all be glad to have Mr. Schofield address us a few words," added Nixon, but he glanced at the super-

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intendent apprehensively, as the latter, in response to the invitation, stepped with alacrity upon the platform.

"Yes," said Mr. Schofield, turning and facing the expectant audience, "I want to say a few words to you. I have heard what Mr. Nixon has been saying — I have listened to him with great pleasure. For I believe that what he has told you is true — in the first place, that the road was right in discharging Bassett and in refusing to reinstate him, and in the second place that no strike can succeed unless it has the public behind it."

Here he glanced at Nixon, who had seated himself in the president's chair and who was nodding from time to time, as Mr. Schofield proceeded, every trace of apprehension banished from his countenance.

"But before I go further," Mr. Schofield continued, "I ought, perhaps, to apologize for my presence here. I had intended, of course, to ask permission to enter, but there wasn't anybody at the door, nor anybody to ask, so I just came in. I ask permission now."

"That's all right," shouted one of the men, "go ahead," and it was evident from their smiling faces that everyone present concurred in the invitation.

"Thank you," said Mr. Schofield. "And now," he continued, more seriously, "I have something to say to you. As I said, I was glad to hear Mr. Nixon's sentiments and to see that, on the whole,

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you agreed with him. I certainly think that the road was right in the stand it took, and I believe all of you will agree with me when you think it over. You have always found the road ready to meet you half way in any reasonable demand, but we've got to maintain discipline or quit business. And, after all — and here I'm talking very frankly to you — it's we who are running the road and not you. Of course, if you don't like the job, you can quit it — we don't quarrel with that; but, if you are really fair-minded, you will see our side, too, which is that if you break the rules, you must take the consequences. When you take employment with the road, you agree to obey the rules, and you can't object if the road holds you to the bargain."

The superintendent was evidently carrying the crowd with him, and he paused a moment before launching his bombshell. Should he launch it, he asked himself, or should he let well enough alone? There would be no strike, everything had been quietly smoothed over. Nixon had carried out his agreement. Was it not wiser to stop now and let affairs take their course? Then the remembrance of Allan West's flushed and indignant face rose before him and he nerved himself to go on.

"So I was interested to hear Mr. Nixon's opinions," he said, slowly, "and I thought you might be interested in knowing how Mr. Nixon arrived at them."

At the words, Nixon turned livid and half-

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started from his chair, but Mr. Schofield heard the movement and turned toward him sternly.

"Sit down," he said, curtly, and the two men who had come in with him moved closer to Nixon's chair. "This representative of yours," he continued, impressively, "came to me this morning. I told him we had decided not to reinstate Bassett. He said that in that case, there would be a strike — a general strike — that would cost us thousands of dollars. He hinted that the stockyards would be set afire and other damage done to the company's property. But in the end, he agreed to report against Bassett and prevent a strike, in consideration of the payment to him of the sum of one thousand dollars."

The room woke up at the words as though a cyclone had suddenly broken loose. Nixon was on his feet, shaking his great fist at the speaker, who was himself trembling with excitement.

"I paid him the money," shouted Mr. Schofield, in a voice which dominated even that tumult, "and he delivered the goods!"

The words fanned the flames anew, for a moment, and then a sudden silence fell upon the crowd, as Bassett sprang to the platform.

"If this thing's true," he shouted, his face as white as Nixon's, "we want proofs. I've stood here an' heard myself called a drunkard an' liar, but I don't care. I want proof."

"And you shall have proof," retorted Mr. Scho-

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field, "if you'll be quiet a minute. That's right — don't let him get away," he added, as Nixon tried to slip from the platform and was promptly collared by the two strangers.

"Who are you?" demanded the prisoner, white with rage. "Leggo me or I'll knock you down!"

"Oh, no, you won't, Johnny," rejoined one of them calmly, and showed his shield.

"Detectives!" gasped Nixon.

"Exactly."

"Let me set down," said Nixon, faintly, and sank back into the chair from which he had arisen.

"Now," continued the superintendent, when that little by-play was ended, "if you'll listen a moment, I'll give you your proof. I had intended to have Nixon arrested as he left my office, but when he told me he was coming right over here, I thought it would be more convincing to all of you if I made the disclosure here. My proof is, that in the inside pocket of Nixon's coat there is a package of ten one hundred dollar bills. They are notes issued by the First National Bank of this city, and range from number A142320 to A142329. As a further mark of identification, each of them has a small cross in red ink just over the head of the eagle."

Bassett sprang toward the crouching man.

"We'll see!" he cried savagely, and ripping Nixon's coat open plunged his hand into the inside pocket.

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An instant later, he snatched it out again, and waved the packet of bills in the air over his head.

“It’s true!” he yelled. “He’s sold us!”

And he turned upon Nixon as though to rend him limb from limb, while the mob pressed forward like so many maddened beasts.

CHAPTER XIV

DECLARATION OF WAR

FOR a moment, it looked as though summary vengeance would be taken upon the special delegate. But the detectives were equal to the occasion. One of them snapped a pair of handcuffs on the wrists of the cowering man, while the other snatched out a revolver and faced the shrieking mob.

"Stand back!" he cried, and when Bassett pressed on, caught him by the collar and flung him away. "Let the law deal with this man. Don't make fools of yourselves! You'll be sorry for it afterwards!"

"He's right!" shouted Mr. Schofield. "Keep your heads, men! Bassett, sit down!" and he caught the engineer, who was literally foaming at the mouth in a spasm of hate and anger, and flung him into a chair.

The frenzy was over in a moment; cooler heads went about among the crowd counselling patience, and, in the end, Nixon was led away between the two detectives, a very different man from the self-assured, impudent fellow who had entered the room

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a short time before. Mr. Schofield accompanied them, having first seen that one of the detectives secured the packet of bills from Bassett to hold for evidence. And it may be added here, in passing, since Nixon will not again appear in the pages of this story, that he was, in due course, brought to trial, convicted of blackmail and sentenced to a term of years in the penitentiary.

There was a moment's silence after Nixon and his captors had left the hall. None of the engineers followed them, but lingered behind, looking inquiringly into each others' faces, for they seemed to feel that there was still something to be said.

Bassett seemed to feel so, too, for as soon as Mr. Schofield and the detectives left the room, he made his way to the door, closed it carefully, and placed a man on guard beside it.

"Now you stay there," he said. "We don't want no more interruptions."

That done, he strode to the other end of the hall and mounted the platform.

"Now, boys," he said, "we've certainly had an eye-opener. Most of you were against me half an hour ago, but maybe you feel different now. We've allers known that there was some scoundrels among these special delegates, but I guess there's goin' t' be one less now, an' anyway none of 'em would dare try t' work the same thing twice. I move that the secretary be instructed to send an account of this

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thing to the grand secretary, at once, an' ask fer another delegate t' be sent down."

"Second the motion!" shouted some one, and it was carried with a roar.

"And now," concluded Bassett, "I guess there ain't nothing more to be said at present. But this thing ain't ended yet—not by no manner o' means."

"No, it ain't!" shouted one of the men. "An' there's another thing. After this, we're back of Rafe Bassett—hey, boys?"

"You bet!" came the chorus.

And when Bassett stepped down from the platform, it was in the guise of a hero. Everyone wanted to shake his hand and to protest undying devotion. He was enthroned more firmly than ever in control of the lodge, and everyone was anxious, as the saying is, to get into the band-wagon.

Bassett was right in saying that the incident was not closed. Indeed, it seemed that it had scarcely begun.

Nixon's arrest and exposure created the biggest kind of a sensation. Newspapers described it under display heads, commented upon it editorially, and battledored and shuttlecocked it around until every phase of it was exhausted. But, curiously enough, while every compliment was paid Mr. Schofield for exposing Nixon, the whole affair seemed rather to incline the public to sympathize with Bassett.

"This exposé," as one paper expressed it, "in no

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way affects the merits of the case. Indeed, it rather indicates that, without a bribe, the special delegate would have reported in Bassett's favour. While the courage of the P. & O. in undertaking to expose the scoundrel cannot but be commended, the public should not permit this grand-stand play, as it were, to obscure the main issue. Whether the road was wrong, or whether Bassett was wrong, is a question whose solution we must await with an open mind."

The labour papers were much more outspoken. While all of them rejoiced ostentatiously in the detection and punishment of Nixon, they also took care to add that the fact that the railroad had to bribe Nixon in order to get a favourable report from him proved beyond a doubt that its case was a bad one.

"This entire occurrence," one of them continued, and not the most rabid by any means, "moves us to inquire on how many occasions have the railroads used bribery in order to accomplish their ends? No one can doubt that the use of money for this purpose is habitual with them, and we should not forget that the bribe-giver is as guilty as the bribe-taker. No bribe is ever given to accomplish an honest purpose, and the great corporations, which know so well how to take advantage of the weaknesses of poor human nature, are more to be despised and abhorred than the pitiable victims whom they have tempted to their ruin."

It was in Mr. Round's office at Cincinnati that

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Mr. Schofield was shown this utterance, and the general manager watched him as he read it, a cynical smile upon his lips.

"You see what's coming, don't you?" he inquired, when Mr. Schofield looked up.

"What is coming?"

"A strike — and public sympathy is going to be on the other side."

"You think so?"

"I know so. I'm afraid we made a mistake, Schofield, in peaching on Nixon."

"Do you know," said the superintendent, "I felt a sort of presentiment of that sort when I started in to give him away. I came mighty near not doing it."

"I wish you hadn't. Why didn't you heed the presentiment?"

"Well," answered Mr. Schofield, slowly, "in the first place, we had mapped out the plan to follow, and I didn't quite feel like discarding it on my own motion. And in the second place — well — I'm almost ashamed to tell you — just as I shut my mouth and got ready to sit down, I remembered young West's face as it looked when I spoke of bribery to him. Somehow, I just had to go on."

"It was scarcely the time to heed a young idealist," said Mr. Round, dryly. "But I'm not blaming you — the mistake was mine, and I take the responsibility for it. I flattered myself that I adopted the course I did from purely utilitarian motives,

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but I'm inclined to suspect that West's enthusiasm had something to do with my decision. You can't mix railroading and impractical idealism, Ed.; the railroading will suffer every time."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Schofield, "I'm afraid it will. It certainly has this time."

"We've got to make the best of it, and do what we can to set things right again. That's mighty little. About all we can do is to get ready for the strike, and to hope that the strikers will make some fool move early in the game that will disgust thinking people. They're pretty sure to, and that's what I'm counting on to help us win out."

"And in the meantime?"

"We'll keep our trains moving!" and Mr. Round closed his jaws with a snap. "Here's what I'm counting on. The engineers and firemen will strike sure — the conductors and brakemen probably. The hardest to replace will be the engineers, and I'm already getting some extra ones under my hand. Within a week, I think we'll have all we need, if we can protect them. The firemen and brakemen won't be so hard to get — there's always a lot hanging around who don't belong to the union, and as for conductors — well, I'm going to put as many men from these offices and yours on the job as can be spared. Clerical work can wait a while. Our secret service is lining up a lot of dependable men to be used as special deputies, and in a week I think I'll have everything in shape. The only thing is,"

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he added, sadly, "we won't have the public with us from the start."

"Of course, if it lasts long enough, there'll be trouble," observed Mr. Schofield.

"That's what I expect — that's what I'm hoping for — for that's what is going to win us public sympathy. As soon as any trouble develops that our men can't handle, we'll call for the state troops. The governor will be with us," he added; "that's one mercy."

"But I thought," began Mr. Schofield, with a vivid remembrance of the rabid anti-corporation campaign the governor had made, "I thought he was all the other way."

"He's seen a light," said Mr. Round, briefly, and while he made no further explanation, it is safe to assume that it was this same light, discovered by the governor soon after taking his seat, which led him eventually to the senate of the United States.

"At any rate," said Mr. Schofield, glancing at his watch and rising, "I'm glad to know that you've got everything so well in hand. I fancy the engineers will hustle things along as fast as they can."

And they did, for the engineers realized, as well as the railroad, the value of public opinion. Another delegate was sent from headquarters without delay, and, fully cognizant of the way the wind was blowing, announced that a strike would be called at once, if Bassett was not reinstated.

The next morning, the delegate, accompanied by

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a local committee, waited upon Mr. Schofield. The interview was short and to the point.

"I have gone over the case," said the delegate, who was a very different individual from Nixon, "and I find that you exceeded your rights in discharging Bassett."

"So there's no use to argue the point, then," said Mr. Schofield.

"None whatever."

"Of course your decision was thoroughly unbiased?"

"Thoroughly so," answered the delegate with perfect composure.

"Well?"

"We demand that Bassett be reinstated at once."

"And we unqualifiedly refuse."

"Very well, sir. You know, I suppose, that there is then only one course open to us?"

"I suppose you mean you'll call a strike?"

"Much as we regret to do so," said the delegate with unction, "that is what we shall have to do."

"I have a picture of your regret," said Mr. Schofield, grimly. "I'm going to have it framed. When will the strike begin?"

"At noon to-morrow," answered the delegate.

"You've figured this thing out? You know what it will mean to the men?"

"What will it mean?"

"It will mean that they'll have to begin at the

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bottom again, so far as this road is concerned. They'll never get their old places back."

"Is that a threat?" asked the delegate, flushing.

"No; it's a statement of fact."

"Well, I guess we can take the consequences. Of course, you've figured it out from your side?"

"Thoroughly," Mr. Schofield answered. "You say the strike begins at noon to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"All trains on the road, I suppose, will be taken on to their destinations?"

"They will be taken to the terminus of the division."

"And there will be no disorder or attempt to interfere with the operation of the road?"

"Not if we can help it," replied the delegate, smiling grimly. "The brotherhood is always on the side of law and order. Come on, boys," and he led the committee from the room.

Two minutes later, Mr. Schofield had Mr. Round on the wire.

"I was just notified," he wired, "that the strike will be called at noon to-morrow."

"All right," flashed back the general manager. "We'll be ready for them. Will get orders forward to you soon as possible."

"O. K.," clicked Mr. Schofield. Then he sent his stenographer to summon Mr. Plumfield and Allan West, and devoted the few minutes before they appeared to the study of the time-card.

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"Well, boys," he began, when they were seated, "I suppose you know there's going to be a strike."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Plumfield, "it's all over the place."

"It starts at noon to-morrow. The engineers will go out and I suppose the firemen will, too, right away. But how about the conductors and brakemen?"

"I don't believe the conductors will go out without orders from headquarters," said the train master reflectively. "And maybe they won't get orders. You know they have been mighty careful recently about engaging in any sympathy strikes."

"Yes, I know they have, and I suppose the brakemen will stay as long as the conductors do. But it's going to be quite a job to get engineers and firemen to move our trains. We've got a total of sixty-two regular trains in both directions every day, and thirty-eight of them are passengers."

"But a lot of them are suburban trains running between Cincinnati and Loveland," put in Allan.

"Yes," agreed the superintendent, consulting the time-card. "Twenty of them are. Of course they can be doubled back and forth, and some of them can be taken off, if necessary. But there must be no interference with the road's through traffic. At 12.15 to-morrow — fifteen minutes after the strike commences — Number Four, our through flier, leaves Cincinnati — and it's going to leave on time,

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if I have to take it out myself. I haven't forgotten how to run an engine, George."

"Neither have I," laughed the train master; "nor how to fire, either. But that's only one train."

"Mr. Round has been getting some men together on the quiet. He knew this thing was coming, and did his best to get ready for it. I only hope he's got enough."

"Of course we'll win," said Allan, hopefully.

"If we don't, it won't be for lack of trying," answered Mr. Schofield grimly. "There's Mr. Round," he added, as the sounder on his desk wakened suddenly to life.

"It's Round," chattered the instrument, when Mr. Schofield had given the go-ahead signal. "I have ten crews here ready for duty. They will live for the present in our offices. I will send eight more crews to Wadsworth to-night. Arrange to lodge and board them in the freight-house, also instruct local officer to swear in ten deputies to protect them—more if necessary. Get as many more local men as you can. You ought to be able to get a good many firemen among men out of work. Eight crews will arrive at Parkersburg from east to-night. If any symptom of trouble, notify sheriff. If he won't act promptly, notify me and I'll get troops. Strikers must be kept away from new men at any cost and company's property protected. Arrest for trespass any found on company's property. Round."

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"O. K.," Mr. Schofield clicked back. "I understand. Good work. That makes a total of twenty-six crews," he added, turning to his companions. "And if by crews, he means conductors and brakemen too, we're pretty well fixed for the present. What do you think about getting local men, George?"

"I wouldn't do it unless it's absolutely necessary," answered the train master. "You can't keep local men shut up, and as sure as we let them go home, the strikers will get them. It will be inviting trouble right away."

"I don't know but what you're right," agreed Mr. Schofield, after a moment's thought. "We'll let that go for the present. I've got plenty to do as it is," and he hastened away to give the orders necessary to prepare the freight-house for the reception of the new men.

Fifty cots were secured, a cook-stove, tables and chairs, some light bed-clothing and a lot of tin dishes. Rude shelves were nailed up along the wall and a supply of canned vegetables, ham and bacon, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, molasses, flour, cornmeal, potatoes and other staples piled upon them, or heaped along the floor beneath. A cook from a small up-town café was hired and the superintendent did not forget to order in a case of tobacco, some decks of cards, dominoes, checkers, and a lot of illustrated papers. For the success of almost any strike-breaking depends on keeping

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the strike-breakers amused, in seeing that they are well-fed, and in taking care that they hold no communication with the strikers. Mr. Schofield proposed to take no chances of failure in any of these directions.

While these preparations were being made, he called in the local detective employed by the road — a tall, raw-boned fellow named Stanley, a miracle of aggressiveness and nerve and with no little detective ability — and explained the situation to him. An hour later, that worthy marched into the mayor's office at the head of ten husky men.

"I want to get these fellows sworn in, Your Honor," he said. "I guess you've heard about the strike."

The mayor looked down from his desk in some perturbation. The railroad element formed a very important portion of his clientele, and he was anxious to do nothing to offend it.

"Now see here, Stanley," he said, "you don't need all this force. We're not going to have any fighting here. If you need help, I'll furnish it."

"Orders is orders, sir," said Stanley. "I was told to git ten men, an' I've got 'em."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Guard the company's property, sir," answered Stanley, promptly, for he knew the proper answer.

"Is it in danger?" inquired the mayor, with irony.

"It will be after to-morrow noon, sir. Besides,

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we're going to get in a lot of strike-breakers to-night and we're going to see that they're not interfered with. And then I've got to patrol the yards and keep out trespassers. You see I've got a pretty big job on hand."

The mayor considered gloomily for a moment; but he really had no choice in the matter, so he reluctantly swore the men in, and handed each of them a special officer's badge.

"Now I just want to say one thing to you fellows," he said, when this ceremony was finished. "These badges and the oath you have just taken give you authority to see that the law is observed—in other words, to see that no right, either of property or person, is interfered with. But they don't give you a right to engage in a riot or to molest anybody who isn't molesting you. Above all, they don't give you a right to use your guns indiscriminately, and if any innocent person is hurt by you, some of you are going to suffer. I'll see to that. That's all."

Word of their presence at the mayor's office had got about, and a little crowd, principally of boys, awaited them outside. When they made their appearance, they were greeted by a chorus of yells, mostly from the aforesaid boys.

"Don't mind 'em," said Stanley, quietly. "It's only a lot of kids," and he marched them off in the direction of the station.

The crowd followed, growing larger as it went,

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but it came to a halt when the freight-house was reached and the deputies entered, closing the door behind them. Two or three stones were thrown, but a couple of policemen, sent by the mayor, soon arrived, and compelled the crowd to disperse.

At nine o'clock that night, forty-eight strike breakers alighted from a special coach which had been attached to the east-bound flier, and were conducted immediately to the freight-house. There was a crowd on the station platform to see them alight, but no effort was made to interfere with them, though again there was hooting and shouting. Train master and superintendent watched this demonstration in silence, and then mounted to their offices.

"What do you think of it?" asked the former.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Schofield, slowly. "But I'm afraid there'll be trouble. Just listen to that," and he motioned toward the row of saloons along the street opposite the yards.

Every one of them was ablaze with light, and every one was crowded, apparently, from the jangle and roar of voices which came from them, and which could be heard even above the noise of the yards. Evidently there was much excitement in railroad-dom, and the prospect for peace upon the morrow was not encouraging.

CHAPTER XV

IN CHARGE AT WADSWORTH

THE P. & O. freight-house at Wadsworth is a long, low, one-storied brick building which stands just across the yards from the station. Like the station, it is dingy and grimy and gritty, as well as inadequate to the needs of the terminal; but no attempt was ever made to clean or brighten — much less to enlarge — it, and its self-respect had long since disappeared as a result of this neglect.

At one end of the building are the offices, where the freight agent and his clerks labour with reports and receipts and bills of lading — a mass and complexity of documents appalling and seemingly inextricable. The offices are crowded and gloomy and ill-smelling, for here, too, the road economizes at the expense of its employees' health; but their condition is order and cleanliness itself when compared with that of the great echoing freight-shed which occupies three-fourths of the building. No light penetrates to it except from the doors, for there is no room for windows, and the doors are overhung by the wide, low roof which covers the surrounding

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platform. As a result, the freight-shed resembles a cavern in everything but atmosphere. In that, it resembles only itself; for its atmosphere is a thing apart, a thing to be encountered nowhere else, compounded as it is of a variety of odours which defy enumeration. You have seen composite photographs? Well, the freight-house atmosphere reminded one of a composite photograph of particularly ugly people. It was something to flee from and wonder at and remember with awe.

A wide platform the height of a freight car door runs all around this portion of the building, abutting on one side on the yards and on the other on the street. Behind it, and stretching along between the yards and the street, is a long platform, an extension of the one running around the building. Beside this platform, a long line of freight cars is always standing — loaded cars from which the freight is being yanked out into the freight-house, or empties into which freight from the house is being hustled. And so various it is — crates, boxes, barrels, kegs, baskets, loose pieces of steel and iron, great sacks of burlap — it is impossible to give any idea of it here. Imagine, if you can, all the things you ever saw in all the stores in town, and all the raw material which is used in your town's manufactures, and you will find that nearly all of it came through the freight depot; to say nothing of your town's products which go out again. It is a strenuous place, the freight depot, and the men who

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labour there are big-armed and strong-backed and deep-chested. For theirs is a job that demands brawn.

It was the echoing cavern of the freight-shed at Wadsworth which had been selected by Mr. Round as headquarters for the strike-breakers, not because it was particularly adapted to that use, but because it was the only place available. So the freight on hand had to be carefully sorted over, the larger articles taken out and stacked on the platform, the smaller ones stacked up at the end of the room nearest the offices, behind a flimsy board partition which had been hastily nailed up. Behind this barrier the freight men were instructed to transact their business, and orders were issued that on no account should any of them be permitted any intercourse with the strike-breakers.

Then some attempt was made to clean the remainder of the room; the tables and cots were put in place, the range installed, the cook put to work arranging his pantry, and the place was ready for its occupants. These, as has been said, arrived on the evening train, and were at once marched over to the place which was to be their home for an indefinite length of time.

Under the glare of the gas lights overhead, the place presented a somewhat more attractive appearance than it did by day, and the bountiful supper which was soon provided did its share toward putting the newcomers in good humour with themselves

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and their surroundings. The odour of cooking had served to mitigate the odour of the freight-house, and a cloud of tobacco smoke soon wiped it out altogether. The strike-breakers, under the softening influence of all this, began to look around at each other and to take the first steps toward getting acquainted.

For they were strangers to each other; they had been gathered together hastily from many different sources, and were as diverse in appearance and, no doubt, in character, as forty-eight men could be. None of them, it was evident at once, would rank very high in the social scale. Most of them were plainly failures, and a glance at their rubicund and mottled faces revealed what the principal cause of failure had been.

“But then,” as Mr. Schofield was remarking to Mr. Plumfield and Allan West, in his office across the yards, at that very moment, “we can keep drink away from them for a time, or, at least, give them just enough to keep them from losing their nerve. It will be easy enough for the first two or three days, but after that we’ll have to look out. The drink hunger will get some of them sure, and they’ll break away; but most of them will stay, because we won’t give them any money till pay-day, and they’re all broke. Those who want to go, we’ll have to let go, of course, for we can’t hold them prisoners — though we’ll be accused of doing it, no matter what happens. Now what I want to say is this — we

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need a man we can trust to make his headquarters in that freight-house and to keep his eye out for trouble. And, Allan, I'm going to give you charge of the situation here. Mr. Plumfield and myself will have to be looking after matters at other points on the line — I'm going to Cincinnati to-morrow and George will go to Parkersburg. I don't believe there's as much chance of trouble here as there is at Cincinnati, where a mob of thugs and toughs can be collected in no time; or at a river town like Parkersburg, where there are always a lot of roustabouts looking for trouble."

"I don't know," said Mr. Plumfield, slowly. "There are more railroad men here than at any other point on the division, since this is division headquarters. And the entire police force consists of about a dozen men."

"I know that," replied the superintendent; "but there's mighty few of the railroad men who will give us any trouble; even if they did want to, in a small town like this everybody knows them, and a man doesn't begin to riot and destroy property where he's generally known — he's too likely to be caught and punished. Anyway, Allan must take the job."

"All right, sir," said Allan. "I'll do my best."

"And now who's the right man to put over there in the freight-house?"

"Reddy Magraw," answered Allan, promptly. "He's true blue and as sharp as a steel trap."

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Mr. Schofield nodded his approval.

"The very man," he agreed. "Will you see him?"

"Yes, sir; right away," and a moment later he was hurrying away in the direction of Reddy's home.

It may be explained in passing that, in Reddy Magraw's home, Allan West was regarded with a degree of veneration and affection possible only to warm Irish hearts.

In the old days, by an accident, it is true, he had brought Reddy out of a dangerous condition of insanity, and, since that time, any member of the Magraw household would have cheerfully risked life and limb for him. So, when, in answer to his knock, Mrs. Magraw opened the door, her honest Irish face lighted with pleasure at sight of him.

"Why, good avenin', Mister West," she cried. "Won't ye come in?"

"I surely will," said Allan. "But since when have I been 'Mister' West?" he added, laughingly, as he stepped inside.

"Iver since you've been chief dispatcher," answered Mrs. Magraw promptly, leading the way and holding the lamp carefully so that he could see. "Indade, we knows our place, sir, an' it's not fer the likes of us t' be gittin' too familiar with the chief dispatcher."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Magraw," laughed Allan.

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"I'm just the same fellow I always was — I haven't changed a bit."

"Not in yer heart, God bless ye. I know that ain't changed an' niver will be. Reddy," she added, opening the door and showing Allan into the room which served as dining-room and sitting-room, "Reddy, here's Mister West."

"Mister West?" echoed Reddy, looking up in surprise. "Who d' ye — Oh, how are ye, Allan," he cried, recognizing the visitor, and springing to his feet with hand outstretched.

"First rate, thank you. And I'm glad you remember my first name, anyhow."

"Oh," said Reddy, "the ole woman's been so stuck up iver since ye got your promotion you'd think it was me. It's been Mister West this an' Mister West that, till half the time I didn't know who she was talkin' about. Won't you set down?"

"Yes," answered Allan, getting out of his coat, which Mrs. Magraw was waiting to receive. "I've come for a little talk. Oh, don't send them away, Mrs. Magraw," he added quickly, for at his words, that lady had begun to herd the children out of the room. "They won't be in the way."

"Yes, they will, sir," she contradicted. "Besides, little pitchers has big ears; though if I iver caught one o' them kids repatin' anything ye didn't want repated, I'd kill him, I would, an' think it good riddance. But it's best t' be on the safe side, an' they'll be very well off in the kitchen."

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The two youngest were protesting somewhat lustily that they did not think they would be at all well off in the kitchen, and immensely preferred to remain where they could continue to gaze at the illustrious visitor; but their mother was inexorable, and banished the whole herd together.

"An' now," said Reddy, when that had been safely accomplished and the door was shut, "what is it?"

"You know the strike begins to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And you know what it's about?"

"Yes. But I can't hardly believe it. Neither kin anybody else who knows that drunken Rafe Bassett. It's about him, ain't it?"

"Yes — we've fired him."

"An' small blame to ye."

"And we won't take him back."

"An' right ye are. I hope ye'll fight it out."

"We intend to. Mr. Schofield has placed me in charge of the situation here."

"An' they couldn't 'a' got anybody better," put in Reddy, with conviction.

"I'm going to do the best I can, anyway — and I want you to help."

"I'm ready."

"You know we brought in a lot of men to-night to take the place of the strikers."

Reddy nodded.

"We've got the freight-house fitted up for them.

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and Stanley has a detail of men guarding it. You know as well as I do that the only way to hold those men is to keep the strikers away from them. Stanley can keep guard all right on the outside, but we've got to have somebody to keep guard on the inside. I want you to go to work there as a kind of head bottle-washer, and keep your eyes open for trouble. At the first sign of it, let me know."

Reddy nodded again.

"All right," he said. "I ain't much at bottle-washin', but I knows how t' kape my eyes open an' my ears too. When do I begin?"

"The sooner the better."

"I'll go over right away, then," and Reddy took down his hat and put on his coat. "Good-bye, old woman," he added to his wife, who had been sitting listening silently to all this. "Look fer me back whin ye see me comin'."

He patted her on the back and started for the door. Mrs. Magraw paused to help Allan into his overcoat.

"You won't be lettin' nothin' happen t' him, Allan?" she asked, anxiously, forgetting his new title in the emotion of the moment.

"That I won't," he assured her.

"I've got a sort o' feelin' that there's goin' t' be trouble, an' that Reddy'll be in it," she added. "It come t' me strong when I set there listenin'."

"Perhaps there will be trouble, Mrs. Magraw,"

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said Allan. "Indeed, I'll be surprised if there isn't. But we'll come through all right."

"Oh, I hope so, sir!" she cried, and lighted him to the door.

She stood in the open doorway holding the lamp above her head as he and Reddy started together down the path to the gate. They had almost reached it, when Reddy suddenly paused, rubbed his forehead perplexedly, and then glanced around at the figure in the doorway.

"I've got t' go back a minute," he said, apologetically. "You go ahead. I'll ketch up with you."

Allan walked on slowly, then, at the gate, he looked around. Reddy was holding Mrs. Magraw in his arms, kissing her as tenderly as any lover. The quick moisture sprang to Allan's eyes; he closed the gate behind him, and started across the yards; for Reddy's house was perched on an embankment which had been left when the lower yards had been graded down to their present level. A minute later, he heard quick steps behind him and Reddy came running up.

"I jest had t' go back," he explained, a little shamefacedly. "I don't know what it was — but somethin' kind o' took me by the elbow an' steered me around. Mighty queer."

They walked on together in silence to the freight-house. As soon as they approached it, they were challenged sharply, and stopped by one of the depu-

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ties. Stanley, attracted by the noise, came up a moment later and passed them through.

"Nobody can come through that line, day or night, unless I say so," he explained. "I'm not going to take any chances."

"That's right," agreed Allan heartily. "Mr. Stanley, this is Reddy Magraw."

"Yes," said Stanley. "I know him. He's all right."

"I'm glad you think so. I'm putting him on the inside to keep his eyes open. He'll report to you, but you oughtn't to be seen talking together too much. You'll report to me, or send him on to me, when you can."

"All right, Mr. West. I'd suggest that he comes along after while and asks the cook for a job. He'd better not make his first appearance with you and me."

"That's a good idea. You wait here, Reddy, till you're sent for."

"Right," agreed Reddy, and sat down on the platform.

Stanley opened the door of the freight-house and led the way in. It was the first time Allan had seen it in its new incarnation, and it wasn't exactly what one would call an attractive scene. Indeed, it was indescribably sordid. Some of the men had gone to bed; others were sitting around the tables playing cards or listlessly turning the leaves of the illustrated papers. The gas lights overhead flared dimly

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through a haze of tobacco smoke. The odour of cooking still lingered in the air, with onions striking the high note, and at one end of the room, the cook was sullenly banging the tin dishes around, as he made a pretence of washing them.

"He won't know Reddy," said Stanley, in an aside. "He ain't been in town long, an' while he was here, he never stuck his nose outside that little joint where he worked. Hello, Sam," he added, in a voice which everyone could hear. "It looks to me like you need some help."

"Help!" snarled the cook. "No, I don't need no help. That's a mistake. I'm a wonder, I am. I kin cook three meals a day fer fifty men, wash th' dishes, make the beds, an' do all the other work without turnin' a hair. I don't need no help. I'm goin' t' quit," he added, in another tone.

"There's a feller outside askin' fer a job, an' I just happened to think of you," said Stanley, and strode to the door. "Here, you," he called to Reddy. "Step in here a minute. Here he is, Sam. What do you think of him?"

"He ain't no prize beauty," said the cook, looking Reddy over critically; "but he looks like he could work. Anybody's better'n nobody. I'll try him," and he led Reddy away and set him to work with the dishes. It was all Allan could do to keep his face straight, as he saw Reddy, with evident repugnance, tie a piece of burlap around his waist for an apron and pick up a dish-cloth.

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Stanley led the way to one of the groups around the tables.

"Boys," he said, in a voice which made all within hearing look up, "this is Mr. West, the chief-dispatcher for this division. He's in complete charge of affairs here at Wadsworth, and he'll see that you get a square deal."

As Allan looked down into the faces gazing up at him, his heart failed him for an instant. How could any good work be done with such material? But he shook the thought away.

"I'll have your details ready to-morrow morning," he said, "and we'll see that you are properly taken care of. We are going to fight this thing through to a finish, and we rely on your help to break this strike, for which there wasn't the shadow of excuse. I don't believe there'll be any trouble, but we'll take every precaution and see that you are thoroughly protected. And when the strike is over, a permanent position will be open to every one of you who wants it and who has made good. I hope that will mean all of you."

There was a little feeble applause at this, but most of his listeners knew, deep down in their hearts, that they would not make good, that they were unfit to hold a permanent position anywhere.

"If you want anything," Allan added, "ask for it. If you're not comfortable, say so. Be loyal to the road and the road will be loyal to you. Good night."

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But as he left the place and walked slowly homeward, the futility of his appeal sickened him. Why should they be loyal to the road — what incentive was there? How could those weak and hopeless and degraded creatures be loyal to anything, except their own desperate needs? They had taken the job offered them for the money there was in it; or, perhaps, for the excitement which might follow. They would be careless and incompetent — it would be a tremendous task to get any results from them at all. He had never before appreciated how difficult it would be. For the railroad was a machine infinitely complicated, infinitely delicate. At noon on the morrow, scores of smooth and nicely-fitting parts would be removed, to be replaced by rough and ill-fitting ones. Who could expect the machine to work smoothly — or, indeed, to work at all, — under such circumstances?

CHAPTER XVI

THE STRIKE BEGINS

THE first day of the strike dawned much as any winter day might — cold and blustery, with a threat of snow in the air. It can not be denied that Allan was exceedingly nervous as he hastened to work. He stopped first at the freight-house, but both Stanley and Reddy Magraw reported that everything there was serene, and that the strikers had made no effort to interfere with the men who were to supplant them.

About the yards, too, everything was moving as usual, and Allan began to wonder if he were the only one to whom the coming hours seemed threatening and full of menace. He might almost have fancied he had dreamed the whole thing but for the patrol on duty before the freight-house. At his desk, he made out the detail of crews from among the strikebreakers, using for this purpose the reports which Mr. Round had secured of the past performances and experience of the strangers. These reports were anything but trustworthy, since they had come from the men themselves, but they were

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the only thing to be had, and he made up his lists from them, giving the more important trains to the men who seemed best fitted to handle them. One thing made the task somewhat easier than it would otherwise have been. He knew that for a few days, at least, there would be no need to supply the places of conductors and brakemen; only engineers and firemen had to be provided now, but, even at that, it was with no little uneasiness that he finally passed the list over to his stenographer to be copied.

The first important train for which he must supply a crew was Number Three, the westbound flyer, leaving Wadsworth at 2.30 P. M. As engineer, he had selected a man named Hummel, who, from the report, seemed to have had an exceptional experience. But as the morning progressed, Allan grew more and more uneasy over the prospect of choosing the wrong man for this important post, and finally decided to have a look at Hummel before announcing the detail. So he called up the freight-house and asked that that individual be sent over to him.

Five minutes later, one of Stanley's deputies ushered into the chief dispatcher's office a man from whom Allan shrank instinctively as from a serpent. He was a thin, undersized fellow, with a face deeply pitted and with the ghastly pallour which smallpox sometimes leaves behind it. But it was not the complexion so much as the eyes which

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disgusted and repelled. It is difficult to describe the effect they produced — they were so venomous, so bloodshot, so reptilian.

“Is your name Hummel?” Allan asked, speaking with an effort not to show his repulsion.

“Yes, sir.”

“You seem to have had a good deal of experience.”

“Ten years of it,” answered Hummel, confidently.

“What was the trouble?”

“What trouble?” demanded Hummel truculently.

“How does it come you’re here?”

“Oh! Well, I never got a square deal. I ain’t no bootlicker I guess is the reason.”

There was already a trace of hostility in his tone, as though he dimly felt the aversion his appearance had occasioned.

“All right,” said Allan, “that’s all I want to know. Thank you for coming over.”

He turned back to his work, and Hummel, after one venomous glance, stalked out the door. Allan watched him and his guard as they crossed the tracks toward the freight-house; then he reached for his list and scratched out Hummel’s name. But which name should be substituted? He hesitated for a moment and then, snatching up his hat, hastened over to the freight-house himself. Half an hour later he returned, with some little informa-

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tion as to the appearance of the owners of the several names. Fully half of them he had checked off as not to be sent out at all, unless it should prove absolutely necessary. From the other half he chose the men who would be needed during the next twenty-four hours.

So the morning passed and noon came, and the great division clock ticked off the seconds as calmly as though this midday was just like any other. To all appearances it was. The first train to start, Number Four, the eastbound flyer, left Cincinnati at 12.15, promptly on time. The regular engineer had, of course, failed to report for duty, and when a special man, convoyed by Mr. Schofield, climbed up on the engine, the fireman, as Nixon had predicted, climbed down. Another man was promptly put in his place, and no further disaffection developed, both conductor and brakeman remained on duty, nor did any switchman attempt to interfere with the train as it rolled slowly out of the yards and on to the main track. Mr. Schofield had chosen the best men at his command for this train, and as it passed station after station on time, Allan's spirits rose perceptibly.

Other trains were started out without misadventure. At Wadsworth, the strike-breakers were convoyed to and from their trains by two of Stanley's men, the remainder patrolling the yards and keeping them clear of loiterers. It was soon evident, however, that ten men would not be enough to

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handle this work night and day, and Allan instructed Stanley to swear in ten more deputies.

So the first afternoon passed and the first evening came.

It was a raw and blustery night, very dark, with dashes of sleet and snow, and, while everything had passed off serenely without sign of trouble, Allan was not wholly at ease as he left his office and started home to supper. In fact, things were *too* serene, and Allan could scarcely believe that the strikers would permit their places to be filled so quietly. Something of this apprehension must have been apparent in his face, as he sat down to supper, for Mamie, who was always quick to note any change in him, looked at him anxiously and started to ask a question, but thought better of it and closed her lips again.

"You're lookin' real tired, Allan," Mary observed.

"I *am* a little tired," he admitted. "A good supper will set me up again. Where's Jack?"

"He hasn't come yet. Delayed out on the road somewheres, I reckon. He's mighty uncertain at his meals since he got his promotion. Here he comes now," she added, as a heavy foot sounded on the side porch, and the back door opened.

They heard him moving around in the kitchen, evidently washing up after the day's work. Then he opened the door and came into the dining room.

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"Hello," he said, nodding all around, and taking his seat. "It's a bad night for sure. How's everything goin', Allan?"

"Oh, all right. We haven't had a bit of trouble."

"I judged so," said Jack, "from the way the trains passed. I was over near Hamden lookin' after that new switch. I don't think there'll be any trouble among the section-men or switch-men, either. They seem t' think the thing's a joke."

"Well, I don't," said Allan gloomily. "I think it's very different from a joke."

The responsibility of his position was beginning to oppress him. Heretofore there had always been somebody higher up with whom, in any unusual emergency, he could consult. Now, he was thrown entirely upon his own resources, and an emergency might arise at any moment which might involve much more than the welfare of the road. Human life might be involved, and law and order—all these might hinge upon a single word, the decision of a moment. If only it might be given him to speak the right word, to decide wisely! He trembled inwardly at thought of the crisis he might be called upon to face.

"I've got to go back," he said, at last, pushing back his chair. "I don't know how long I'll be," he added, "so don't wait up for me."

"I'll go with you," said Jack, catching a tele-

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graphic glance from Mamie and hastily gulping down his coffee. "I want to take a look around an' see how things are."

"All right," said Allan, "come along," and together they went out into the night.

The wind had increased in violence and the weather was turning much colder. They needed all their breath, as they fought their way up the street against the wind. At the freight shed, Allan paused for a word with one of the guards, who was stamping his feet and clapping his arms against his sides in an effort to keep warm.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the guard, recognizing his voice, "everything serene. Not a sign of trouble anywhere."

"That's good," said Allan, and started across the yards.

"I'm goin' to look around a while," said Jack. "I'll look you up in half an hour or so."

"All right," said Allan, and continued on to his office, while Jack's figure vanished instantly in the darkness.

Jack had turned back toward the freight-house, intending to ask a few questions of the guard, but as he passed the platform at the lower end, a voice hailed him.

"That you, Jack?"

"Yes," Welsh answered, peering around, "but where are you?"

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"Down here under the platform," and as Jack stooped, the odour of tobacco smoke assailed his nostrils.

"Oh, is it you, Reddy?" he asked.

"Yes. Come under an' set down."

Jack groped his way under and, guided by the glow of Reddy's pipe, sat down beside him. The quarters were rather cramped, but the cold wind did not reach them and so they were fairly comfortable.

"What you doin' out here?" Jack demanded.

"Oh," said Reddy, "I got so tired lookin' at them bums in there an' listenin' to their big mouths, that I jest had t' git away by myself an' have a quiet smoke. Did ye ever wash dishes?"

"Oh, once in a while," Jack answered, laughing, and getting out his pipe to keep Reddy company.

"Well, it's a mighty poor way t' earn a livin'," said the latter. "If it wasn't fer Allan, I'd a-thrown up the job afore I took it—but they's goin' t' be trouble."

"There is? When?"

"Most any time. Them fellers can't do without whiskey any more'n you kin do without air. They're havin' a meetin' about it now."

"They are? What for?"

"They want t' go an' come as they please—between the freight-house an' them saloons over there. They say they're bein' kept prisoners."

"But that's all nonsense!"

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“Don’t I know it,” said Reddy, scornfully, gazing at the lighted windows across the yards which marked the chief dispatcher’s office. “But any excuse’ll do when a man’s lookin’ fer trouble. I guess the strikers had a pointer this was comin’ — that’s the reason they’ve been so quiet.”

“You mean you think there’s somebody tippin’ things off to them?”

“Yes; but I ain’t dead sure, yet,” answered Reddy, knocking out his pipe. “Drop in here every evenin’ an’ see me, Jack,” he added. “I’d like t’ talk things over with ye. I must be gittin’ back. Hello, there goes the messenger,” he went on, as a figure strode from the freight-shed across the yards. “Good-night.”

“Good-night,” Jack answered, and he sat watching the messenger. He saw him mount the stair that led to the division offices, and, a few minutes later, saw him come down again, accompanied by Allan West. He watched them cross the yards towards him, and mount the platform, heard a door open and shut, and all was still.

“If I could only help!” he murmured to himself, with drawn lips. “But I can’t — I can’t! An’ it’s a hard fight!”

Meanwhile, inside the freight-house a queer scene was enacting. As must be the case when any body of men are thrown together, a leader had developed, or had arrogated to himself the rights

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of leadership. In this instance, the leader, strangely enough, was not one of the larger or older men, but a small fellow whose livid pock-marked face and shifty eyes told of life in city slums and not in God's open air — told, too, of a soul as well as body infected — in a word, Hummel. The personnel of the men had changed somewhat during the afternoon. Ten or twelve crews had been sent out, and as many had come in, but there was still present a majority of those who had arrived the night before. Hummel, of course, had been assigned to no run, and those that remained with him were the undesirables, the ones against whose names Allan had placed a check-mark. Among these, Hummel had been working quietly all day, talking to them first singly, then in groups of two and three, and finally, when they had finished supper, he had spoken out boldly.

"I don't know how you fellers feel about it," he said, getting to his feet and pounding on the table to attract their attention, "but I feel a good deal as though I was in a lock-up. Oh, I ain't no hypocrite — I knows how a lock-up feels, and I guess I ain't the only one here as does. But I didn't hire out to this here road t' be locked up, an' I won't stand it. This is a free country —"

"Now, see here, brother," interposed Stanley, who had come hurrying up, "you ain't locked up, an' you know it. We're treatin' you right. We're givin' you good grub an' a good bed an' we've got

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a lookout jest to make sure you ain't interfered with."

"You mean t' say I kin go out that door if I want to?" queried Hummel.

"You sure can."

"An' come back if I want to?"

"No," said Stanley, sweetly. "You can't come back. If you go out, you lose your job."

"That's it!" shouted Hummel, banging the table again. "We kin go out, but we can't come back! Why can't we come back?"

"You'll have to ask Mr. West," replied Stanley.

"Who's he?"

"He's the chief dispatcher, and in charge here."

"That kid what sent for me this mornin'?"

"The same. But he ain't a kid an' I'd advise you not to monkey with him."

"Pooh!" said Hummel, contemptuously. "I guess I kin hold my own with a purty boy like that. Where is he?"

"I've sent for him. He'll be here in a minute," and indeed, even as he spoke the words, Allan entered.

Hummel, thoroughly angry, looked Allan up and down with a single glance of the eye, and continued to stare at him impudently as he approached.

"What's the trouble, Stanley?" Allan queried, for he had heard Hummel's excited voice as he opened the door.

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"Oh, I guess this feller has gone without booze about as long as he can stand it," answered Stanley, with a wave of his hand toward the white-faced protestant. "He wants to go out an' git some, I reckon."

"That's a lie!" shouted Hummel, waving his arms in the air. "All I want is my rights as a free American citizen. You can't work no peonage racket on me. You can't keep me a prisoner —"

"Nobody wants to," broke in Allan. "Take your coat and hat and get out."

"And I will come back —"

"No, you won't — you're fired. Get out."

"When do I get my wages?"

"Next payday — in about three weeks."

"That's justice, ain't it! I kin afford t' loaf around here three weeks, can't I, t' git one day's pay!"

"Leave your address and the check will be sent you," said Allan.

But that was just what Hummel could not do, for he had no idea where he would be in three weeks. Besides, a glance around at the faces of his companions showed him that he was going too fast — that he had not secured their sympathy.

"All right," he said, after a moment, controlling himself by a mighty effort. "I guess I kin stand it awhile longer. I just wanted t' be sure you weren't tryin' to keep us prisoners. I'll stay."

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"No, you won't," retorted Allan, promptly. "I've already told you you're fired. Now get out, or I'll have Stanley throw you out. I guess you can do it, can't you, Stanley?"

"Try me," said Stanley, grinning down from his six feet upon the little man before him. "Say the word."

But Hummel didn't wait for that. With one glance at the big officer, he turned to the wall and took down his overcoat from a hook where he had hung it. His face was livid and his lips were drawn back from his yellow teeth in an ugly snarl, as he started for the door. Stanley followed him and gave the sentry outside word to pass him. Hummel went down the steps silently, save for a queer hissing in his throat, and Stanley stood and watched him until he disappeared in the darkness. Then he went slowly back into the freight-shed, his face very grave.

"That fellow means trouble," he said to himself. "He means trouble. Mebbe I'd ort to run him in."

Could he have seen Hummel at that moment, he would have been more than ever convinced that he was a dangerous man to be at large. For he had stopped in the shadow of a box-car and waited until Stanley, re-entering the building, closed the door behind him. Then, creeping closer, he concealed himself behind a pile of ties. There he sat down, hugging his knees with his arms,

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“I’ll git him,” he muttered, over and over to himself. “I’ll git him. Oh, I’ll git him,” and he sat staring at the freight-house door with eyes like a wild beast’s.

CHAPTER XVII

EVENTS OF THE NIGHT

INSIDE the freight-house, meanwhile, Allan had called the men together and was giving them a little talk.

“I want you men to understand,” he said, “that you are in no sense confined here. You’re free to go at any time. But if you do go, you can’t come back. And I think all of you will understand the necessity for that rule. We are keeping you here, at considerable expense to ourselves, in order to protect you from interference by the strikers. We are trying to see that you are well fed and comfortably lodged, and we are giving you this board and lodging without charge. Of course, this isn’t all pure philanthropy on our part. We are doing it because we believe that it is only in this way we can keep you together. If we permitted you to board and lodge out in the town, we would never know when you were going to show up for your run. There would always be the danger that you would be prevented from coming, either by force or persuasion. It would be impossible for us to

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run the road in that way. The only way we can run it is to know certainly that you will be on hand when needed, and the only way we can be certain of that is to keep you together. When the strike is ended, there will be no further need of doing that, and a permanent place will be offered every one of you who makes good. If there are any of you who aren't willing to work for the present under those conditions, now is the time to say so. If you want to quit, you are free to do so."

He looked around over the circle of faces, and waited a moment to see if there was any response.

"That's fair enough," said one of the men at last. "I ain't got no kick comin'," and he walked over toward his cot, and began to make preparations to turn in. Two or three others followed his example, and finally the whole group broke up quietly.

"And *that's* all right," said Stanley, with a sigh of relief. "I'm glad we got rid of that other duck. He meant trouble — an' he means it yet. You look out for him, Mr. West."

"All right," answered Allan, with a laugh. "I guess I can look out for myself."

"You'll need an eye in the back of your head t' do it," commented Stanley. "He's the style that hits from behind."

"Well, I'll keep my eyes open — and you keep yours open, too."

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"Trust me for that," said the detective. "Good night, sir."

"Good night," said Allan and stepped out into the darkness.

As his feet touched the platform outside the door he felt that it was covered with sleet, and by the glint of a distant street lamp, he could see that the sleet was still falling. He hesitated an instant, looking up and down the street.

"Bad night for railroading," he said to himself. "I guess I'd better see how things are going," and instead of descending the steps to the street, he followed the platform around the building and started across the tracks toward his office.

Jack Welsh, sitting under the platform where Reddy had left him, smoked his pipe placidly and stared out across the maze of tracks which separated him from the depot building across the yards. A sputtering arc light hung before the station, revealing the groups of figures picking their way carefully along the icy station platform. The rails gleamed white with their coating of ice, and the storm of sleet fell incessantly. Overhead Jack could hear the burdened wires creaking under their load of ice. Occasionally the yard engine came slipping along, vomiting sand on both rails in its effort to grip them, but freight was light, and after awhile, its work ended for a time, it retired to the lower yards, where it stood puffing on a siding. The east-bound flyer, Number Two, was

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past due, but its failure to arrive caused Jack no uneasiness, for he knew that it was impossible for any train to keep to its schedule on such a night. Occasionally he heard overhead the tramp of the guard going his rounds; far down the yards gleamed the red and yellow lamps guarding the switches; a switchman's lantern waved from time to time. Jack, sitting cosily in his shelter, watched and understood and revelled in all this; for your old railroad man — born and bred amid these surroundings — finds his work grow more interesting, more fascinating, from year to year, until any other employment seems pale and savourless by comparison.

As Welsh sat there musing, a quick step sounded on the platform over his head, and a lithe figure jumped to the ground and started across the tracks toward the offices.

“O' course he'd be goin' back there instead o' goin' home,” Jack muttered to himself. “Now, what'd I better do? Hello, what's that?”

He had caught the sound of a stealthy step overhead, and an instant later, a slim form leaped to the ground and sprang after Allan as swift and noiseless as a panther.

There was a menace in that crouched figure which brought Jack out from under the platform with a jerk. Staring with startled eyes, he fancied he caught a gleam as of a knife-blade in the air and a warning cry leaped involuntarily to his lips.

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"Hey, Allan. Look out!" he shouted.

And Allan, starting sharp around at the cry, found himself face to face with Hummel.

The latter, stopping short in his swift career by a mighty effort, stood for an instant, his face convulsed, one hand behind him.

"Well, what is it?" Allan asked, sharply, surveying him with astonishment.

"I — I wanted t' see you," answered Hummel, thickly. "I — I —"

"Well, go on," said Allan, impatiently, as the latter stopped.

"I was hurryin'," Hummel gasped. "I'm out o' breath. I wants me job back."

"You can't have it. Now get out of these yards. If I catch you here again, I'll have you run in."

Hummel's face flushed, and he made a convulsive movement forward, but stopped, as he heard rapid steps drawing near.

"Why, was it you who shouted, Jack?" asked Allan, in surprise, as the latter came running up. "What was the matter?"

"I seen this feller sneakin' acrost the yards after you," Jack explained, apologetically, "an' I thought he meant trouble. I didn't know he was a friend o' yours."

"I jest wanted t' speak t' him," said Hummel, gruffly, and started to turn away.

But Jack caught him by the arm.

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"Wait a minute," he said. "Let's look into this. Is he a friend o' yours?"

"No," Allan answered. "Quite the contrary. He's a fellow I fired a while ago."

"Oh," said Jack, and looked at Hummel more closely. "What're ye holdin' one hand behind your back for?" he demanded. "Let's see it!"

He grabbed at the hidden hand, but at the same instant Hummel, supple as an eel, slipped from his grasp, ducked, and sped down the yards like a shadow.

Jack and Allan stood for an instant staring after him. Then the former, with a sudden exclamation, raised his hand and looked at it. It was covered with blood.

"I thought so!" he cried. "He had a knife! I saw it when he was runnin' after you."

"Are you hurt?" and Allan, snatching out his handkerchief, wiped away the blood.

"Only a scratch. The knife got me when I grabbed at him. It's nothin'. You go ahead, an' I'll see if I can find him."

Allan, examining the wound, saw that it was not a deep one.

"All right," he said, wrapping his handkerchief about it. "I'll wait for you at the office."

Jack nodded and hastened away down the yards in the direction Hummel had taken. But search as he might, he found no trace of that worthy, who

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had dived in among a lot of box cars stored on the sidings, and made good his escape.

Allan, meanwhile, continued on to his office, and sat thoughtfully down before his desk. The incident of the evening, his own narrow escape, enlightened him as to the danger of the situation. Calm as it appeared on the surface, it was perilous enough underneath, like a vast bed of lava, apparently cool and firm, but ready, at any pin-prick, to burst forth into white-hot flame. He shivered a little at thought of the days to follow and the problems they would present.

But after a moment he shook such thoughts impatiently away. Time enough to cross a bridge when he came to it. Now there were other matters demanding his attention. For, as the night progressed, the load of sleet burdened the wires more and more heavily, until some gave way and the others sputtered and stuttered and sent operators and dispatchers alike to the verge of frenzy.

Nothing disorganizes a railroad more quickly than impeded or inefficient wires, for the reason that its operation depends wholly upon its telegraph system. To interfere with that means inevitably to interfere with traffic, to obstruct it is to obstruct traffic, and to stop it is to stop traffic, or to compel it, at best, to creep painfully along from station to station with one flagman walking in front of every train and another following it a hundred

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yards in the rear. It may be added that it was the telegraph which made modern railroading possible; and that it becomes impossible at the moment when the dispatcher at headquarters cannot, in some way, keep informed of the position of every train.

So to-night with the wires chattering unintelligible nonsense instead of the usual crisp orders and reports, operators and dispatchers were at their wits' ends, traffic was delayed, the schedule abandoned and the only hope was that some way, somehow, they would get through the night without accident.

Allan stood for a moment at the door of the dispatchers' office listening to the crazy instruments.

"I've only got one wire left," announced the dispatcher in charge of the Parkersburg division, "and I might as well try to send a message over a piece of clothes line as over it. I haven't any idea where that extra west is. It left Vigo half an hour ago, and hasn't been seen since."

"Where's Number Two?" asked Allan.

"Number Two will be here in four or five minutes," answered the other dispatcher.

"And that freight ought to have been here ten minutes ago!" wailed the first speaker. "Oh, it's enough to drive a man crazy," and he went on calling Schooley's.

The east bound flyer could not, of course, be permitted to leave Wadsworth until the west bound freight had pulled in, or had been definitely located.

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It was lost as completely as though it had wandered away to the farthest corner of the globe.

Allan stood for a moment with a line of perplexity between his eyebrows. Then he looked up with a sudden interest as he heard the faint click-click, click-click which told that the operator at Schooley's had answered at last.

"How about extra west?" clicked the dispatcher.

"Passed here at 9.22," came the answer.

Allan glanced at the clock. It was 9.47; in other words, the train had passed Schooley's twenty-five minutes previously, and Schooley's was only seven miles out. That seven miles should have been covered in fifteen minutes at the outside. What, then, had happened to delay the train?

A long whistle in the distance told of the approach of the flyer, and a minute later, it rumbled into the station and came wheezing to a stop. The train would stop for five minutes to change engines. That it should be held up longer than that by a freight train was heartrending. It was over half an hour late already, and Allan had hoped that some of this lost time might be made up on the run east to Parkersburg.

"There's only one thing to be done," he said, "and that's to flag out till we find that freight train," and he hurried down the stairs to give the necessary orders.

Already the new engine had been backed up and



“HE EXPLAINED THE DIFFICULTY TO THE ENGINEER.”

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coupled onto the train. Engineer and fireman were in their places, having been convoyed safely across the yards by two of Stanley's men, who remained in the cab to see that they were not interfered with until the train should pull out.

At the foot of the stairs, Allan met the conductor, Andy Leaveland, one of the oldest on the road. He was on his way up to register and get his orders, when Allan stopped him.

"I've got the orders, Mr. Leaveland," he said. "We'll have to flag out."

"*Flag* out!" cried the veteran. "What's the matter? Wires down?"

"There's a freight lost somewhere between here and Schooley's. We've got to find it. You'd better start your brakeman out right away."

"All right," said Leaveland, and hurried away, while Allan walked forward to the engine.

He explained the difficulty to the engineer, and a minute later, the brakeman, armed with lantern, torpedoes and fusee, hurried past. Leaveland gave him time to get two or three hundred yards ahead, and then gave the signal to start.

The train crawled slowly out through the yards, past the shops and the great coal chute, and finally emerged upon the main track. Far ahead, Allan could see the brakeman's lantern bobbing along. The ice on the track rendered rapid walking impossible and more than once, the train was brought to a stop to give the brakeman a chance to maintain

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his distance. Back in the coaches, the passengers were fuming and fretting, while the conductor was doing his best to pacify them.

"We're going mighty slow," he said. "Most roads would go faster. But this road don't take any chances. We won't get you through on time, but we'll get you through safe and sound, without the slightest chance of accident. I guess if we put it to a vote, most of you would vote for safety rather than speed," and he looked around at the passengers with a smile.

"You bet we would," assented one of the men, and there was less grumbling after that.

And yet there are few things more trying to the nerves than to ride in a train which may proceed no faster than a man can walk. An hour was consumed in covering five miles, and not a trace of the missing freight had been discovered. Another mile — and then Allan, staring forward through the night, saw the brakeman's lantern waving violently.

"He's found something," he said, and the engineer nodded.

The next moment, a fusee flared redly through the darkness, lighting up the brakeman — and something on the track back of him — a dim shape —

"Why, it's the train!" cried Allan. "And with its headlight out! And with no brakeman out to protect it! I don't understand it!" And he sat

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with his brows knitted in thought as the train rolled slowly forward.

It stopped within thirty feet of the other train, and Allan swung himself to the ground and ran forward.

“What’s happened?” he asked the brakeman, who came to meet him. “Where’s the crew?”

“Blamed if I know,” answered the brakeman, in an awed voice. “There’s the train, but nary a trace of her crew could I find. She’s deserted!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DERELICT

DRIFTING along the ocean currents of the world are scores of abandoned, water-logged ships, washed by the waves and buffeted by the winds, yet still, by some miracle, keeping afloat. Every one of them tells of some tragedy of the sea — of some supreme moment of peril, when, thinking the end at hand, the crew has taken to the boats and left their ship to its fate. And there is no peril of the deep more dreaded by mariners, for it is one that can not be foreseen nor guarded against. Lying low in the waves, heavy and water-logged, these hulks drift down upon a ship unseen in the watches of the night; there is a crash, a rush of water — and another tragedy has been enacted.

Another tragedy which, only a few short years ago, too frequently meant the loss of the ship and every soul on board. How often has some stately vessel, thronged with happy people, set sail from a crowded harbour over a fair summer sea, upon a voyage seemingly certain to prove prosperous and pleasant — never to be seen again! How agonized

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those first days of uncertainty when the ship did not appear at the port for which it had set sail. Days passed, and still no word from it; days and days, during which hope changed to doubt and doubt to despair; days and days, until finally men knew that it would never appear — that it had vanished into the deep — that it had struck an iceberg or a derelict and sunk with all on board.

But science, with its giant strides, has changed all that. The ship may go down, but at least she can give warning of her danger. For in a little cubby-hole on the upper deck, his hand upon his instrument, sits the wireless operator, flashing to the four winds of heaven the “C. Q. D., C. Q. D.,” which tells of deadly peril and the need of instant aid. And every ship within a hundred miles, catching that signal, turns in her tracks and speeds, full steam ahead, to render what aid she can. Truly, a fearful and wonderful thing, this wireless, with its slender filaments and lofty masts and bursts of ether-compelling flame, yoking to man’s service something more impalpable than the air itself, binding ocean to ocean around the whole face of the earth. An accident may happen — that ship may go down — the derelict may do its deadly work — but at least the world will know. And if there is any vessel within reaching distance, the passengers will be saved! Ill-fated *Bourgogne*, slowly settling beneath the icy waters off the Grand Banks, with aid just beyond the horizon, but all unconscious

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of her desperate need; ill-fated *Naronic*, lost with all on board, how or where for all time unsolved and unsolvable; ill-fated *Republic*, sending forth her cry for aid through the night and through the fog, lost, indeed, but with every living soul saved uninjured — a new tale and a new wonder on history's page!

But here was a derelict of a new kind — a derelict on land — no less deadly than the derelict on sea; standing four-square in the way of traffic, a threat and a mystery.

Some such thought as this ran through Allan's mind, as he stood for an instant staring in astonishment at the deserted train. Why was it here? Why had it been abandoned? What stress of peril was it had compelled its crew to leave it? What peril could there be to drive them not only from the train, but from the neighbourhood? The question staggered the reason. Above all, why had its headlight been extinguished? That seemed to argue design — seemed to argue malicious intent — seemed to argue that the missing crew were deserters, traitors — as much a traitor as the soldier who deserts in the face of the enemy.

And then, as the steam popped off from the abandoned locomotive, he awoke with a start to the necessity for instant action.

"We've got to get that train in on a siding," he said to the brakeman. "We'll have to back up

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to Schooley's. It's only a mile. Ask Leaveland and his engineer to come here right away."

As the fireman hurried away, Allan ran forward and swung himself up into the cab of the deserted engine. He glanced at the water gauge and saw that there was plenty of water in the boiler, but he opened the door of the firebox as an extra precaution. Evidently the engine had been abandoned only a short time before, for the fire was burning briskly. He saw that the brakes had been applied and the throttle closed —

"What's the matter?" asked Leaveland's voice. "Is this the train?"

"Yes, this is the train, all right," Allan answered, "but I don't see anything of the crew."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" and Leaveland scratched his head in perplexity. "What do you suppose happened?"

"I don't know. Let's take a look at the caboose," and jumping to the ground, he started back along the train.

The door of the caboose was swinging open, and a glare of yellow light came through it from the oil lamp, with polished tin reflector back of it, which was attached to the front wall. Allan sprang up the steps, with Leaveland after him, and both of them stopped in astonishment at the open door. The caboose was empty, but two stools stood on the floor before the stove, and between them a box on which was a checker-board and checkers. Evi-

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dently the conductor and rear brakeman had been playing together, but had been interrupted in their game and had left the board just as it was, expecting to return to it. They had not returned, however, but had vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed them.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Leaveland again. "There's something mighty queer about this. If I believed in ghosts, now —"

"No, I don't think it's ghosts," laughed Allan. "But we can't stop to investigate. We'd better couple the two engines together, and let Number Two push this train back to Schooley's. You go ahead and have that done, and I'll stay here. I'll burn a fusee if I want you to stop, but I don't think there's any danger, because nothing will get past Schooley's till this train has been accounted for."

"All right, sir," assented Leaveland, and hurried back toward the engine.

Allan, left to himself, made a careful inspection of the caboose, but search as he might, he could find nothing that shed the slightest light upon the disappearance of the train crew. It was evident that there had been no struggle of any kind. He found the conductor's report made up ready to turn in at the end of the trip, and his lantern and dinner-pail on the floor near the door. The more he examined the surroundings the plainer it was that when the conductor and brakeman left the caboose, they had expected to return to it in a minute or

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two. And that they had left it only a short time before was evident from the fact that the fire in their stove had just been renewed and was burning briskly.

He gave up the problem, at last, and getting a fusee out of the box where they were kept, he stepped out upon the rear platform. As he did so, he heard the cars of the train buckling toward him, and an instant later the caboose caught the motion and started slowly up the track toward Schooley's. The mile was soon covered, and the train, coming to a stop just outside the little town, was run in on a siding, while the flyer proceeded on to the station. There Allan reported it, secured orders for it, and sent it on its way. Then he proceeded to try to solve the mystery of the abandoned freight train.

But there was little or nothing to be learned concerning it more than he already knew. It had passed through Schooley's without stopping, and the operator there had observed nothing wrong with it. After half an hour's inquiry, Allan gave it up, ordered another crew sent out from Wadsworth, and finally, after reporting the occurrence to Stanley, turned in at his own gate about midnight, very tired and not a little worried.

As he entered the house, he was surprised to see a light burning in the dining-room, and he opened the door softly and looked in. For a moment, he saw no one, and thinking that the room was empty

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and that the light had simply been left burning for him, he was about to turn it out, when his eyes fell upon a figure curled up on the lounge which stood against the wall under the windows.

"Why, it's Mamie!" he said, half to himself, and took a step toward her. "I wonder —"

And then he stopped suddenly, for, awakened by the noise of his entrance or by the consciousness of his presence, she opened her eyes and looked at him.

For a moment, she lay so, looking up, her lips parted in a smile. Then, with a quick movement, she brushed her hand over her eyes and sat upright, her cheeks crimson with a strange confusion.

"Why, Allan!" she cried. "Do you know, I — I must have been asleep!"

"Yes," he agreed, laughing. "I don't think there's any doubt of it. Since when have you taken to sleeping on this lounge?"

"I wasn't at all sleepy to-night," Mamie explained, "and I knew it wasn't any use to go to bed, so I thought I'd read awhile till I got sleepy or till you — till you —"

"Or till I got home," said Allan, finishing the sentence for her. "Admit, Mamie, that you were sitting up for me!"

"Yes, I was!" confessed the girl, raising her eyes for one swift glance at him. "Dad came home and told about that horrid man trying to kill

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you, and I — I just couldn't stand it to go to bed without seeing you."

Allan took a quick turn up and down the room. That shy and timorous glance had moved him strangely, as did the faltering words which followed it.

"Suppose he had killed you!" she added, with a little gasp of horror at the thought.

"But he didn't," said Allan, coming back to her. "So what's the use of supposing anything of the sort?"

"Dad says he'll be sure to try it again. Dad says —"

"Dad says altogether too much," broke in Allan. "Now, see here, Mamie, I'm not going to have you worried like this. Wait till I see your father!"

"Oh, but I want him to tell me! If you're in danger, I want to know it!"

"But I'm not in any danger — as for that affair with Hummel, it happened so long ago that I'd nearly forgotten it."

"So long ago!" cried Mamie. "Why, it was only this evening!"

"Well, so much has happened since. Mamie, I'm worried to death," he added, with sudden weakness. "The queerest thing happened to-night you ever heard of."

"Tell me about it," said Mamie, her face glowing with pleasure at this call for sympathy and help; and she patted the lounge invitingly. I fear

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there was some instinct of the coquette in Mamie, or she would not have done that! Some true womanly instinct, too, or she would not have so welcomed this chance to be of help.

Allan sat down, his pulses not wholly steady, and told of the strange disappearance of the crew of the extra west, while Mamie listened spell-bound.

"Well, if that doesn't beat anything I ever heard!" she cried, when he had finished. "What do you suppose happened?"

"I haven't any idea. Only I'm sure the strikers must have had something to do with it. I'm going to take Stanley out to look the place over in the morning. Maybe we'll discover something. Stanley is pretty shrewd, you know."

"But if the strikers had something to do with it," Mamie protested, "maybe they will be there yet! And you will walk right into them!"

"Well?" laughed Allan. "What if I do? Indeed, I hope I will!"

"Oh, but think what they will do to you!"

"They won't do anything very bad! We're not living in the Middle Ages, Mamie. I believe you think we're going to find the bloody corpses of that train crew out there in a ditch, somewhere!"

"But if they aren't dead, where are they?"

"Kidnapped. The strikers are taking that method of getting our men away from us."

Mamie thought it over a minute, and then shook her head.

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"Maybe you're right," she said, "but it seems to me that the strikers would be pretty foolish to do anything like that. Suppose they do take a crew, that won't matter much, will it?"

"No; not one crew; but suppose they keep on taking them?"

Mamie stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"Do you mean that's what you think they'll do?" she questioned.

"I don't know — it's a thought that came to me. But it seems foolish, too. Well, we'll find out in the morning. And now you must be getting to bed. How about the beauty sleep?"

"Beauty sleep, indeed!" cried Mamie, tossing her head. "I don't need any beauty sleep!"

"No, you don't!" agreed Allan, gazing at the piquant face. "Do you know, Mamie, you're growing up into the prettiest girl imaginable!"

"Growing up!" echoed Mamie. "I've grown up! Why, I'm nearly seventeen!"

"A tremendous age!"

"Old enough to know you're talking nonsense!" she retorted, but with the colour coming and going in her cheeks.

"I'm not!" he protested. "It's true! If I was younger, Mamie, I'd be falling in love with you!"

"Younger!"

"I'm twenty-seven."

"A tremendous age!" she echoed, glancing up at him.

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"Ten years older than you!"

"Pooh! What's ten years?"

"Well, it's a good deal," said Allan, rising with an effort. "And I feel considerably older than twenty-seven to-night — more like forty! You can keep on sitting up, if you want to, but I'm going to bed. Good-night."

Mamie had risen too, a strange light in her eyes. She watched him as he turned away, and then, when his hand was on the knob of the door, she called him.

"Allan.

"Yes?" he said, turning and looking at her.

The lamplight sent little mocking shadows across her face and brought out the glint of gold in her hair. He held on to the door-knob to keep from going back to her.

"Promise me you'll not run into any danger," she said, softly.

"Of course I won't — not unless I have to."

"Not even if you have to!"

"What — run away?" he demanded, staring at her in astonishment. "You wouldn't have me do that, Mamie?"

"No," she said, "I wouldn't have you do that! Good night, Allan."

"Good night," he repeated, and opened the door and went resolutely up the stair to his room.

And Mamie, standing listening until the sound

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of his steps died away, at last flung herself down upon the lounge and buried her face in her arms. Her eyes were wet with tears — but they were tears of joy.

CHAPTER XIX

THE OLD STONE HOUSE

It is doubtful if any sensation had ever stirred the staid little town of Wadsworth from centre to circumference as did the news to which it awoke next morning. The story of the missing train crew, of the mysteriously abandoned train, flew from mouth to mouth, gaining always in the telling some thrilling detail, the generally accepted version being that the strikers had wrecked the train and butchered the crew, the conductor and brakeman perishing in trying to protect the "scab" engineer and fireman. There was no one to worry especially about the latter, for they were strangers whose names were not even known, but the conductor and the two brakemen all had families, to say nothing of relatives and friends, and all of these were very properly exercised.

Allan, foreseeing this excitement, reached his office almost at daybreak, but early as it was, he found three excited women awaiting him, demanding information, hope, encouragement. Of information he had little to give, but of hope and encouragement a-plenty.

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"There's absolutely no reason why you should be so worried," he told them, when he got them into his office and the door closed. "Your husbands haven't been injured in any way — I'm sure of it. They'll be back safe and sound in a day or two."

"What makes you think they haven't been hurt?" demanded one of the women. "You don't really know, do you?"

"No, I don't really know. But it's absurd to believe anything else."

"But who did it?"

"I don't know."

"But you suspect! Oh, if I thought it was the strikers, I'd — I'd tear their eyes out!"

And the other two women added that they would be glad to help.

"Now, see here," broke in Allan, realizing that forceful measures were necessary, "we mustn't have any nonsense of that sort. I don't know whether it was the strikers or not — there's nothing to show it was. If it was, they'll be punished — trust me for that. If it wasn't, let's not accuse them. I want you to promise to leave this thing in my hands. We're going to do everything possible to clear it up. I want you to promise me to go home and stay there and not do any talking for forty-eight hours."

"And if we do, what will you promise?"

Allan hesitated an instant.

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"I'll promise," he said, drawing a deep breath, "that in forty-eight hours the men will be back again."

They gazed at him a moment — at the clear eyes, the firm lips, the determined jaw — and something of his self-confidence communicated itself to them. And they promised and left the office in much better spirits than when they had entered it.

Almost before the door closed after them, Allan had summoned Stanley, and while waiting for that worthy to appear, gave orders that no information concerning the mystery, or concerning anything else connected with the strike should be given out by anyone but himself. He wanted to be left free, for a few hours, at least, to work on the case in his own way.

Stanley, evidently knowing what was in the wind, lost no time in obeying the summons. Allan told him, briefly, the story of the mystery, and laid before him the theory which he had mentioned to Mamie the night before — that this was only a preliminary move on the part of the strikers. Stanley listened in silence, and sat for a moment thinking it over when Allan had finished.

"I don't know," he said, at last. "I can't say I think much of your theory. It looks to me like a mighty bold thing for the strikers to do — an' what's worse, a mighty foolish one. They can't hope to capture enough men to really cripple us. Where would they keep them?"

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"I'm sure I don't know. But what other explanation can there be?"

"Well," said Stanley, "I'm always in favour of the simplest explanation. Maybe the whole thing was just a plain robbery. Were the car seals examined after the train got in?"

"Yes — I'd thought of that. None of the seals were broken."

"It ain't so much of a trick t' doctor a seal, if a feller's fixed for it," Stanley observed.

"But suppose it was a robbery — where is the crew? Nobody would want to steal them?"

"I'd like to look over the ground before I do any more guessing," said Stanley. "Why can't I run out there? Everything's quiet here and I can be back by night."

"Just what I was thinking of," agreed Allan. "And I'm going with you. We can take the accommodation — I'll get the conductor to drop us off at the place we found the train."

"All right," said Stanley, rising. "I'll just run over to the freight-house an' give my men a few orders. I'll be back in five minutes."

"We've got fifteen," said Allan, glancing at his watch. "I'll meet you down on the platform." Then he called the office-boy from the outer room. "Jim," he said, "I'm going to be busy for a while and don't want to be disturbed. See that I'm not."

"All right, sir," said Jim, and retired to take

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his stand before the door, like Cerberus before the gate of Hades.

For the next ten minutes, Allan devoted his whole mind to clearing away the accumulated work which piled his desk. Fortunately, he had an intelligent and efficient stenographer, and tossed the last letter to him just as the accommodation pulled in.

"That's all," he said. "I'm going out to Schooley's. You can catch me there, if you need me, but I'll probably be back by the middle of the afternoon. Hello!" he added, as he reached for coat and hat, "what's all that noise?"

And, indeed, from the sounds, it seemed that a riot of some sort was taking place in the outer office.

Allan flung open the door, and paused, amazed, on the threshold. For a dozen men rushed at him with a violence which almost carried him off his feet.

"Here; hold on!" he shouted. "What's the matter with you fellows, anyway?"

"We want to know —"

"Everybody says see you —"

"We must have the story —"

"Oh, reporters!" cried Allan, suddenly understanding. "I can't give you anything now, boys; I've got to catch a train. I'll give you the whole story as soon as I get back."

"When will that be?"

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"Sometime this afternoon."

"But, look here," began one of the men desperately; but Allan tore his way through and sprang down the steps two at a time.

At the foot, another man was waiting for him, and Allan recognized the special delegate.

"See here, Mr. West," he began, excitedly, "I understand the Brotherhood's accused of having a hand in this thing, and I just want to say to you that it didn't —"

"All right," said Allan, and swung himself on to the rear platform of the train. "I'll be back this afternoon. Drop in and talk it over."

"I will. There isn't a bit of truth in the —"

But the delegate's voice was drowned by the rumble of the train as it started.

Allan, entering the coach, found Stanley awaiting him. They dropped into a seat together.

"Well, did they get you?" asked the detective, grinning.

"I managed to break away. But I nearly missed the train. Then that fellow in charge of the strike held me up to say the Brotherhood hadn't anything to do with this thing."

"Oh, no," said Stanley, "of course the Brotherhood didn't. But that isn't saying that none of its members did."

The conductor came up at that moment and stopped for a moment's chat.

"We want to drop off about a mile and a half

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this side of Schooley's," said Allan. "I'll show you the place."

"All right. Going out to look over the ground?"

"Yes; and to solve the riddle if we can. By the way, I'm glad to see the conductors and brakemen still at work. I hope you're going to stick."

"Well," answered the other, "we had a meeting last night, but of course I can't tell you what happened there. I can say this, though — you don't need to lose any sleep over it yet awhile."

"That's good," said Allan, his cheeks flushing with pleasure. "Here we are!" he added, as he glanced out the window.

The conductor pulled the signal cord sharply and Allan and Stanley dropped off as the train's speed slackened. Then the conductor gave the go-ahead signal, and the train sped eastward on its way.

They had been carried a little past the place where the derelict had been discovered. Allan led the way back, pointed out the spot, as nearly as he could — very nearly, however, for he found the fusee which the fireman had burnt — and then sat down on the bank beside the roadway, while Stanley prowled up and down like some sort of wild beast. His great hooked nose seemed to grow longer and more hooked, and his little close-set eyes sparkled with a strange brilliancy. For Stanley was really a man of considerable ability and had been

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successful in clearing up more than one abstruse problem. Allan watched him with a good deal of curiosity, and the thought came to him that he would not care to have this fellow on his trail.

"I can't make much out of it," Stanley said at last, stopping before Allan. "Let's look around the neighbourhood a little."

The track, at this point, ran along a shallow cut, the bank on either side rising to a height of two or three feet. The right of way, about twenty-five feet in width, was bordered by rail fences, and back of them was a stretch of scrubby woodland. Stanley, walking slowly along the bank on the left, stopped suddenly and pointed to the ground.

"Look at that," he said. "There's been a wagon here. Two wagons," he added, a moment later, pointing to other traces.

"To take the prisoners away in," ventured Allan.

"Maybe, maybe," muttered his companion. "And maybe to take something else away in. Let's see where they went."

The tracks could be followed without difficulty in the soft earth. They led to a break in one of the fences and on through the strip of woodland to a road on the farther side. There they turned westward and were lost amid the ruts of the road.

"Well," said Stanley, stopping and looking along it, "I think, if you don't mind, that I'd like to spend a day or two trying to run those fellows down. I don't see that I'm needed back at Wads-

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worth — everything's quiet there, and my men know their business. Besides, you can keep an eye on them. This affair kind of worries me. There's more in it than appears on the surface. What do you say?"

"All right," Allan agreed. "I'd like to have this thing cleared up. Do you think you can do it?"

"I can try, anyway," said Stanley. "And I'll start right away. I don't want the trail to get any colder. Good by."

"Good by," said Allan; "and good luck."

He stood watching Stanley's gaunt figure until it disappeared around a turn in the road, wishing absurdly that he could go along; then he turned eastward toward the little station of Schooley's, a mile or more away. The road was one evidently not much used, for it was rutted and uneven and in poor repair. The fall and winter rains had washed it badly, and evidently no effort had been made to repair it. In fact, it soon grew so bad that Allan began to doubt whether it was anything more than a private road. The trees on either side grew closer and closer to it, there was no vestige of a fence, and after a time it became apparent that its direction had changed so that it was not leading him toward Schooley's at all. A glance at the sun showed him that it was past midday, and his stomach began to warn him that he had eaten nothing since breakfast early that morning.

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He stopped for a moment in perplexity and considered what he would better do. He might strike off into the woods in the direction in which he thought Schooley's to be, but he was by no means certain of the direction, and the most probable result of such a course would be to get lost and miss his way entirely. The road he was following must certainly lead to a house; there were wagon tracks and hoof-prints on it which seemed fresh, so he concluded that the best thing he could do was to push forward as rapidly as possible, find the house to which the road led, and then, if he was any considerable distance from Schooley's, hire a vehicle of some sort to take him on to his destination.

He walked on more rapidly, after that, following the road as it turned and twisted among the trees. The ground grew uneven and at last actually hilly, and the road grew worse and worse. Allan began to fear that it led only to a wood-lot or outlying field, and was more than once tempted to turn back, seek the railroad track and follow it into Schooley's. But always he resolved to go around the next corner and the next, and finally his perseverance was rewarded.

For there, almost hidden behind a screen of trees, with hills protecting it on either side, stood an old stone house.

Heartened by this discovery, Allan hurried forward, and yet, as he drew near, he hesitated, for there was about the place something indescribably

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desolate and dreary — something almost threatening. The windows across the front of the house were all closed by heavy shutters. There were five of them, one on either side of the door in the lower story, and three in the story above. The house was square and solidly built, but had fallen into neglect and decay. The roof was covered with moss, and the path to the front door broken and uneven. There was a tumble-down barn some distance back of it and one or two other decrepit outbuildings, from which, however, came no sign of life.

Allan, for a moment, thought the house deserted, too; then his eyes caught a faint streamer of smoke which drifted sluggishly upward from one of the chimneys, and, encouraged by this sign of human occupancy, he hastened forward and knocked at the front door.

There was no response, and he knocked again more loudly. Still there was no response, though he fancied that he detected a sort of uneasy movement inside the house, as though some one were moving cautiously along the hall, and he had a sensation as though some one was staring out at him. It was a sensation anything but pleasant, as every one who has experienced it knows, and it required no little resolution for him to carry his quest further. But he resolutely shook away the feeling of uneasiness, and, leaving the front door, he proceeded around the house, determined to try a door

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at the back. He knew that there was some one in the house and he determined to have him out.

He found the rear of the house even more dilapidated and forbidding than the front. A ramshackle porch ran across the back, in the last stages of decay, its floor rotted through and its roof falling in. Near by was an old pump which had evidently yielded no water for many years. This did not seem to indicate that the house was occupied, but Allan picked his way carefully across the porch, and knocked at the back door. Again there was silence. He banged with his closed fist, and when there was no response, he tried the door, rattling the knob fiercely. But the door was locked. And then, suddenly, it seemed to him that he could hear a confused sound of voices, faint and far away. He listened intently, and banged the door again, and again there came that confused murmur. After all it might be only an echo, Allan told himself; no doubt the house was cavernous and empty, and would re-echo strangely to any sound. Or the house might be full of bats—or some strange creature might have its dwelling place there.

He crossed the porch again and breathed a little easier as he stood once more in the open air. Plainly, there was nothing for him to do but retrace his steps to the railroad and follow it in to Schooley's. He sighed at thought of the weary way he had to go.

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“ I’ll have a look at the barn, first,” he murmured to himself, and started toward it.

It was perhaps a hundred feet back of the house, and leaned so dangerously to one side that it seemed in danger of falling at any moment. There were two doors, a large one running upon an overhead rail, and a smaller one swinging upon hinges. He tried the smaller one first, and found that it yielded to his touch. Swinging it open, he stepped inside the barn.

“ Hello ! ” he called. “ Is there any one here ? ”

There was no response, but he fancied that he heard a faint rustling at the farther end of the structure. For a moment, in the semidarkness, he could see nothing, then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to it, he saw that the place was empty. The stalls on either side had fallen to decay, the roof had rotted away in places and the floor was wet and mucky and covered with an ill-smelling litter. There had at one time been a loft, but the planks which had composed the flooring had disappeared, stolen no doubt by some one in the neighbourhood. Only at the farther end did he find any indication of recent occupancy. Here in the mangers were some fresh cobs from which the corn had evidently been eaten only a short time before, and the floor was covered with a litter of straw, which was tramped and soiled, indeed, but which was still comparatively clean. Farther on, two boards had been laid across a manger and piled with straw,

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which was pressed down as though it had been used for a bed. It was from this, Allan concluded, that the rustling had proceeded, doubtless from some rats running through it.

Satisfied that it was useless to look further, Allan turned back toward the door. He was tired and discouraged. He felt that the day had been wasted. The mystery of the abandoned train was no nearer solution than it had been, unless Stanley —

What was it sent a sudden chill through him? What was it brought him with a start out of this reverie?

He turned his head with a jerk and threw up his arm instinctively, as a dark shadow seemed to loom over him; then a great blow fell upon his head, the world reeled and turned black before him, and he fell forward limply upon his face.

CHAPTER XX

THE AWAKENING

AT Wadsworth, the day had passed quietly enough, so far, at least, as appearances went. The strikers gathered in groups in the neighbourhood of the station, and watched the trains go in and out, with the new engineers and firemen in the cabs, but they made no attempt to interfere with them, beyond an occasional jeer. Simpson, the special delegate from the grand lodge, had established his headquarters in the lodge room, and a little group of men was constantly about him, talking over the situation. It was noticeable that this group was composed of the older and more experienced men, and it was evident that whatever Simpson had to say had a great deal of weight with them.

Simpson, as has been said, was a very different man from Nixon. There was nothing flashy or loud about him, his voice was low, but cool and decisive, and his gray eyes gave one the impression that their owner was a fighter—an impression which was further deepened by the long, cloven

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chin. In a word, the grand secretary had picked out the very best man at his disposal when the demand had come for a delegate to succeed Nixon, for he felt that there must be no possibility of the situation at Wadsworth being bungled a second time.

“There’s one thing sure, however,” he had said to Simpson, at parting; “they’re bound to have a strike down there now, and there’s probably no way to stop it.”

And Simpson had found this to be true. To have attempted to withstand the white hot fervour for a strike would have been worse than foolish, and he had yielded to it and called the strike. Now he was bending every effort to make the strike a success; or, at worst, to get out of the situation with as little loss of prestige as possible.

But the strike had not tied up the road as he had hoped it would. Conductors and brakemen had refused to go out without instructions from headquarters; switchmen and operators had not even asked for such instructions. And trains were running regularly, manned by a lot of new men who seemed fairly efficient. If the strike had started out with a mistake, Simpson was resolved that no others should be committed — especially not the fatal mistake of violence. And so he was taking care to establish himself in the liking and confidence of the older and more conservative men. If it came to a fight, he must be certain of his backing.

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Over at the freight-house, the new men had got settled in their quarters and seemed fairly contented with them. If truth were told, sordid and unattractive as the surroundings were, most of the men had been accustomed to much worse. The food, too, however carelessly served, was at least clean and wholesome, and only a person unused to anything but china and snowy linen would have quarrelled with the tin dishes and oil-cloth covered tables.

It was evident that the principal source of disturbance had been removed when Hummel had been compelled to leave the place; and yet there was no telling when a second Hummel might arise and leaven the entire group of men with discontent. Indeed, it was evident that many of them were not wholly at ease. In the midst of these unusually comfortable surroundings, they perhaps felt the same sense of disquiet which Jean Valjean felt in the Bishop's bed; they were accustomed to a plank and could not sleep well upon springs and a mattress; but this was not the sort of disquiet which would lead to any serious results.

And yet Reddy, who kept a keener eye than ever upon events in Stanley's absence, was not altogether satisfied. Indeed, Stanley's absence of itself puzzled him. Orders had been given that the adventure of the abandoned train was to be kept quiet as long as possible, and no word concerning it had been breathed inside the freight-house. So, as the

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day wore on, Reddy grew more and more uneasy, especially when he noted that Allan was also away. He suspected that something was wrong somewhere, and it annoyed him that he should be shut up like this, away from all communication with his fellow creatures. Certainly, he did not consider the cook a fellow creature, and, in spite of himself, he could not help feeling a sort of pitying contempt for the strike-breakers. For Reddy was honest, was industrious, was temperate, and he felt that few of the strike-breakers were any of these things.

“An’ a fine figger you cut here, don’t you,” he went on, following this train of thought, “washin’ dishes an’ makin’ beds an’ waitin’ on table, like a saloon loafer, instead o’ doin’ an honest man’s work! I’m goin’ t’ throw up the job. I ain’t doin’ no good here. These fellers are as contented as a lot o’ hogs in the sunshine. I’ll jest tell Allan —”

“Say!” suddenly bawled a voice in his ear, “air ye goin’ t’ sleep on yer feet? Wake up, an’ git a move!” and a heavy hand struck him a hard blow on the shoulder.

Reddy turned with a start, and the dish he was wiping slipped from his hands to the floor. Of course it did not break, as it was made of tin, but it made a tremendous clatter.

“Stoopid!” yelled the cook, sticking his red face within a few inches of Reddy’s and waving his arms violently. “Awkward! I never saw nothin’ to beat you! You’re the limit!”

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“Aw, shut up,” growled Reddy, not yielding an inch.

“An’ you calls yerself a dish-washer — ”

“No, I don’t,” broke in Reddy. “An’ I never will now that I’ve seen you!”

“What!” shouted the cook, growing purple. “I’ll show you — ” and his arm was drawn back to strike.

But at that instant, Reddy’s fist was raised with seeming slowness and gentleness under the other’s jaw, and the cook, lifted by some mysterious force cleanly off his feet, struck the floor with a thud.

“Good for you, turnip-top!” yelled one of the strike-breakers, as they came crowding around, attracted by the noise of the altercation.

“Get up, cookie, get up!” yelled another. “You ain’t out yet — don’t show yellow!”

And Reddy, fairly dancing with rage, added his insults to the others’.

“Strike a gentleman, would ye!” he cried. “Don’t lay there blinkin’ like that! Stand up an’ take yer medicine like a man. Here, I’ll bring ye around!” and snatching the pan of dirty dish water from the table, he dashed it over his recumbent foe.

A roar of laughter arose from the spectators; this was the sort of thing most of them delighted in; but their merriment acted on Reddy like a cold shower. He took one glance at them and then fiercely tore off the ragged piece of burlap he had been using as an apron.

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“An’ now I’ll bid ye good-bye,” he said. “I was jest thinkin’ o’ quittin’ — this job don’t suit me,” and catching up his hat, he plunged through the door and past the astonished guard on the platform outside.

“Stop me if ye dare!” cried Reddy, and took off his hat and threw it high in the air, but the guard, recognizing him, turned away with a grin. “My, but it does feel good t’ be out in the air again an’ away from them dishes. I never knew before how good air smelt.”

He filled his lungs to the limit and exhaled slowly, feeling as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Then he stopped and looked about the yards.

“Not much doin’,” he added, seeing the empty sidings; and, indeed, for fear it could not fulfil its engagements, the road was routing all the freight business possible through Columbus by way of the Midland division, instead of through Wadsworth, and was even handing some of it over to competing lines. “Why, hello, Jack!” he cried, as Jack Welsh suddenly turned the corner of the freight-house.

Jack stared at him in astonishment.

“Is it you, Reddy?” he asked. “When did you get out?”

“Faith,” said Reddy, his eyes twinkling, “it sounds like I’d been in the workhouse an’ me niver arrested in me life! I’ve throwed up me job.”

“Throwed up your job?”

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“ Since when have ye turned into an echo? ” demanded Reddy.

Jack laughed.

“ I was too surprised t’ say anything original. What was the trouble? ”

“ I couldn’t stand it — I couldn’t stand them vermin, nor washin’ dishes nor makin’ beds fer ’em — nor I couldn’t stand that varmint of a cook. He got smart,” went on Reddy, growing angry again at thought of it, “ so I jest upper-cut him an’ throwed some dish water on him an’ come away.”

“ But,” protested Jack, “ what will Allan say? ”

“ I don’t care what he says,” retorted Reddy, doggedly. “ I ain’t needed in there — them fellers is like a flock of sheep — feed ’em an’ water ’em an’ they’ll never give any trouble. Besides, where is Allan — an’ where’s Stanley? Is there trouble somewheres, Jack? ”

“ Ain’t you heard about extra west last night? ”

“ Nary a word — a felly might as well be in his grave as in that freight-shed. What about extra west? ”

So Jack told him the story of the abandoned train and missing crew, while Reddy stood listening with starting eyes and open mouth.

“ Well, if that don’t beat anything I ever heard! ” he said, when Jack had finished. “ But Allan and Stanley wasn’t there — ”

“ No; they went out this mornin’ t’ look over the

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ground. They was expectin' t' come back this ar-ternoon."

A sudden shadow seemed to pass across Reddy's face.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack, noticing it.

"I was jest thinkin'," said Reddy, speaking with some difficulty, "that I'd 'a' liked to gone along."

"So would I, but I wasn't asked."

"Well, good-bye," Reddy said, turning away. "I've got t' go home an' see my missus, an' git a decent meal. Jack," he added, stopping and looking back, "if they don't come back, let's go out ourselves in the mornin'."

"Oh, they'll be back," said Jack, confidently. "Allan, anyway. He knows he's needed here."

But the cloud had not lifted from Reddy's face, as he walked away across the yards in the direction of his home.

The afternoon passed, and nothing was heard from either Allan or Stanley; evening fell, and still no sign of them. The disappointed reporters champed and swore and tried to inveigle the story out of some of the other employees of the office, but in vain; and finally, driven to desperation, they concocted such accounts of the affair as their several imaginations were capable of.

One thing they knew. The road's chief dispatcher and detective were absent. From an ab-

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sence to a disappearance is but a step, and it was with a certain satisfaction that they played up this feature of the case. At least, they would get even with West for trying to keep the news away from them. They described his career, his appearance, dwelt upon Stanley's well-known prowess and fearlessness, and drew the conclusion, that something extraordinary must have occurred to get the best of him. It made a good story, and the public read and was interested and mystified and wondered languidly how it would all turn out — and passed on to the next sensation.

But in one home, at least, as the weary hours of the night wore on, there was something more than languid interest and wonder. From her snowy bed, Mamie Welsh lay staring up into the darkness, her face flushed and feverish, her eyes red with weeping, striving to suppress the sobs which shook her, so that her mother might not hear and understand.

For she knew, by a sort of clairvoyance, as though his spirit called through space to hers, that Allan West lay somewhere in great peril.

It was dark when Allan struggled back to consciousness, — not dark in the ordinary sense, but pitch dark, — a blackness that oppressed and chilled with the sense of some unknown and unspeakable peril. He lay for a long time without moving, without thinking, just conscious in a dim way that

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he existed. Gradually he became aware of an all-pervading pain, which finally resolved into an aching head and an aching shoulder and cramped legs and arms. Then, in a flash, life surged in on him and he remembered the old stone house, the barn, the shadow, the blow which he had tried to avoid.

He struggled to get to his feet, only to fall back with a groan of anguish; for his hands were tied behind him and his feet were lashed together. Even had he been free, his whirling, aching head would have chained him down.

But his head grew clearer after a while and he could think connectedly. Where was he? Not in the barn, that was certain, for he could feel beneath him a floor of boards, instead of the wet and clammy dirt upon which he had fallen. In the house, then — his unknown assailant had carried him into the house, tied him hand and foot and left him.

For what purpose?

But that was a question for which he could find no reasonable answer; nor could he even guess at his assailant's identity. This murderous assault had made the mystery more puzzling than ever, for he could guess at no motive for it. Certainly he was not the victim of personal enmity, for he knew that he had no enemies — Dan Nolan's death had delivered him from the only one he ever had who was capable of resorting to such methods as this. Nor could he see how his being held a prisoner here

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could possibly be of any benefit to anyone. Indeed, there was certain to be a hue and cry after him if he was held a prisoner long. Stanley would know where to look for him — and there were Jack and Reddy.

Allan's eyes filled with tears as he thought of the anxiety they were doubtless suffering. And Mamie — was she suffering, too? Somehow, the thought of her was a very dear and moving one, and he whispered her name over and over to himself. If only —

He felt singularly weak and helpless; he could do nothing but lie where he was and await the will of his captors. He wondered vaguely what they would do with him, and he turned the thought over in his mind with a kind of impersonal interest as though it were not at all himself, but someone else entirely who was principally concerned. It seemed almost as though he were watching a drama in which he himself was an actor.

The cramped posture in which he lay became insupportable at last, and he managed, with infinite suffering, to turn himself over on his side. Then, finding himself somewhat easier, he at last dropped off to sleep.

He was awakened by a flash of light in his eyes. For a minute, he saw only a dim figure holding a lantern, then, with clearing vision, he found himself staring into a face which sent a chill of horror through him. Never before had he seen a face so

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repulsive. - The round head, set low between the shoulders, was crowned by a dirty towse of hair which fell over the low forehead almost into the eyes. These, bloodshot and venomous, were sunk deep into the head and ambushed under bristling eyebrows. The nose, a mere unformed lump of flesh, overhung a mouth whose pendulous, blackened lips were parted in a malicious grin. The figure was squat and heavy, telling of great strength and even of a certain agility; but to the figure Allan gave only a single glance, for the face fascinated him as only superlatively ugly things can.

For a moment, this being stood shading his eyes from the lantern light with a great, hairy hand, and staring down at his prisoner. Then, with a hoarse grunt of satisfaction, he turned toward the door.

But Allan, mustering all his courage, shouted after him.

"Hold on!" he cried. "Hold on!"

The fellow hesitated for an instant, and then turned back, and stood regarding Allan with that diabolical leer still upon his lips.

"What's all this about?" demanded Allan, steeling himself to endure the gaze of those crafty and threatening eyes. "How long am I going to be kept here?"

His captor laughed, or rather emitted a low rumble.

"Not long," he croaked, hoarsely. "Not long."

"My friends will be after me in the morning."

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"Let 'em!" and again came that rumbling laughter.

"It will go hard with you if they find me here."

"Don't worry; they won't find you."

"What do you mean by that?"

But the other only laughed again by way of answer.

"Was it you who struck me out there in the stable?"

"It surely was."

"What had I done?"

A spasm of hate crossed the ferocious face.

"You hadn't no business out there nor around here."

"Maybe not," Allan admitted. "Let me go and I'll clear out."

The words were greeted by a burst of laughter, so wild that Allan was suddenly convinced that he had to do with a wild man, a lunatic wholly irresponsible for his actions. The thought sent a deeper chill through him.

"Let me go," he urged more gently. "I have done you no harm."

"Ain't you, though!" retorted his strange companion. "Well, you'll never do nobody else no harm, neither."

And without heeding the entreaties Allan sent after him, he went out and closed the door.

Allan heard his footsteps die away along the hall outside, and then, after a moment, came that queer

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murmur of voices which he had heard from the back door, only louder and clearer. And a sudden conviction leaped into his mind.

The missing train-crew was imprisoned here also.

He listened with bated breath as the murmur grew and grew, and finally died away as though it had spent itself. He judged that his captor had visited the other prisoners to make sure they were all safe, and had then departed.

But who was this wild man? What sort of monster was this which had been let loose upon the world? How, single handed, had he been able to capture five men? And what was his object in doing so?

Here were three questions to which no reasonable answer seemed possible. Allan felt almost as though he were living through some terrible nightmare, from which he must presently awaken. Surely such things as this could not happen here in Ohio, in the midst of a thickly populated country! In the Middle Ages, perhaps; but not here in the twentieth century!

The pain of his position had become excessive, and he rolled over on his back, and sought to ease himself a little. He could feel that his hair was clotted with blood, and from the pain in his shoulder he was convinced that a bone had been broken — his collar-bone, probably. His head grew giddy after a while and a deathly sickness came upon him. The close and fetid atmosphere of the room seemed

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to stifle him. He shrieked aloud, but there was no response, and presently he lapsed into a sort of half-consciousness.

He fancied that he was stretched upon the rack, that black-hooded inquisitors were advancing to the torture. He could feel the bonds about hands and feet slowly tighten and stretch, and a pang of agony shot through him. What was it they wanted him to confess? Something involving Jack — something involving Mamie. No, he would never confess — after all, there was nothing to confess — it was a lie they were trying to wring from him. Again the cords tightened and stretched; he was being torn asunder, but he clenched his teeth and crushed back the groan which would have burst from him. Again — and this time there was no resisting, and he cried aloud —

Cried aloud and opened his eyes, and, after a moment, realized where he was. He was panting for breath, for the air was thick with smoke. Afar off, he could hear a frantic shouting, which beat in upon his brain and turned him faint, so agonized it was. They were torturing some one else — they had left him for the moment to regain some measure of strength. No, they had decided to suffocate him; they had started a fire under him — it was to be the trial of flame! Mamie, Mamie — he would never tell!

Then, suddenly, he understood. The house was on fire — that madman had fired it — that shout-

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ing was from the other prisoners, who were perhaps already being roasted alive! Roasted alive!

He wrenched frantically at his bonds, but they held as though of iron. He struggled to a sitting posture, but could rise no further. By an effort almost superhuman, he dragged himself to the door, and turning his back to it, tore at it with his fingers. Then he managed to raise himself so that his fingers clutched the latch; the door swung open and he fell backward into the hall.

That fall racked him with agony, but, with sweat running down his face in little rivulets, he managed to grovel forward, inch by inch, pushing himself along by his legs, sparing his injured shoulder as much as he could. One foot, two feet, three feet. Then, suddenly, he realized that his head was hanging over an abyss — his shoulders were over — and in an instant he had pitched forward wildly, and fell shrieking into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXI

“ C. Q. D.”

IN the gray dawn of the winter morning, Mamie Welsh started wide awake from the restless doze into which she had fallen. She sat up in bed, her head to one side as though listening for some faint and distant sound. Then, with a quick movement, she threw back the bed-clothes, slipped to the floor, pulled a shawl about her, thrust her feet into a pair of slippers, and ran to the door of the room where her father and mother slept.

Mary Welsh, a light sleeper at all times, was awake at the first tap of Mamie's fingers.

“ Who's there? ” she called.

“ It's me, Mamie.”

“ What's the matter, dearie? ” cried Mrs. Welsh, jumping out of bed and hastening to open the door. “ What's the matter? ” she repeated, her arms about her daughter. “ Not sick? ” For Mamie's face in the dim light was positively ghastly, so livid and drawn it was.

“ No, I — I'm not sick,” sobbed Mamie, suddenly giving way and clinging desperately to her

“C. Q. D.”

mother. “I — I don’t know what it is, only I’m so worried about Allan.”

And Mrs. Welsh, with a sudden tightening of the heart, understood.

“There, there,” she said, and she drew her daughter’s head down upon her shoulder and patted her soothingly. “There, there; he’ll be back safe an’ sound, dearie, never fear!”

“But oh! mother! I dreamed such a terrible dream. He was in some awful danger, hurt and bleeding, in the dark, and a horrible man was torturing him, and he called to me and held out his hands. I heard his voice, mother, as plainly as I hear yours — it woke me up,” and Mamie shivered convulsively at the remembrance.

Mrs. Welsh was no more superstitious than the ordinary Irish woman, but there was something in the words — something in the voice which uttered them — which somehow struck a responsive chord in her, and she shivered in sympathy with the trembling figure she held in her arms.

Jack, meanwhile, disturbed by all this talking, suddenly awakened to find his wife missing, and sat up in bed rubbing his eyes and staring at the ghostly figures near the door.

“Who’s that?” he asked, but a convulsive sob from Mamie told who it was, and thoroughly awakened at last, he was out of bed in an instant. “What’s wrong?” he demanded. “What’s the matter with you women?”

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"Mamie's worried about Allan," answered Mrs. Welsh, hugging tight the shivering figure in her arms.

"Oh, dad!" sobbed Mamie. "I dreamed about him and he — he was calling me!"

"Calling you? What d'ye mean, Mamie?"

"He was calling me to come to him. Oh, dad, we must go!"

"Go?" repeated Jack, in amazement. "Go where?"

"Out to Schooley's — or wherever it is — you will, won't you, dad?"

She had her arms around her father, now, and there was a pathos, an entreaty in her voice that wrung his heart.

"I was goin' out this mornin', anyway," he said, smoothing her hair gently, "an' I guess I might as well start now."

"And I'm going with you, dad."

"No, no," he protested. "What good would that do, Mamie?"

"Good!" she cried. "Why, dad, you don't know where to find him!"

"And do you?"

Her face changed — seemed to whiten and harden — and her eyes stared past them into the gloom.

"Yes!" she whispered, her hands clasped tight against her heart.

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Mrs. Welsh, her hand grasping Jack's arm, nodded to him to consent.

“All right,” he agreed, his voice not wholly steady. “All right, Mamie. Jump into your clothes. Maybe we kin ketch first ninety-eight.”

Neither Jack Welsh nor his wife could ever explain the spirit of desperate haste which suddenly possessed them. Mamie, apparently in a sort of trance, returned to her room and dressed herself deliberately and calmly, but with a wonderful celerity, as surely as she could have done in broad daylight; while Jack, in the semi-darkness, bungled into his clothes somehow, his fingers all thumbs.

Mrs. Welsh, meanwhile, throwing a wrapper around her, hastened downstairs, and when the other two came down five minutes later — Mamie having assisted her father in the last stages of his toilet — she had a cup of hot coffee for each of them, and a lunch done up in a napkin for them to take along. She kissed them both at the front door and stood watching them until they were out of sight. Then she turned slowly back into the house, blew out the lamp in the kitchen, and mounted to her bedroom. But not to sleep. In the cold light of the dawn, she sank on her knees beside the bed and buried her face in her hands.

Jack and Mamie reached the yards just as Bill Grimes, the conductor of first ninety-eight, was

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raising his hand to give the signal to start. He was charmed to have them as his guests, and hustled them into the caboose, much to the embarrassment of an impressionable young brakeman, who was just changing his shoes. He thought he had never seen anything so lovely as Mamie, and stammered profuse apologies, which Mamie acknowledged with an absent-minded nod. Poor fellow! her thoughts were far away from him.

He cheerfully undertook to climb forward over the long train and to ask the engineer to slow up at the spot where the abandoned train had been discovered, and fifteen minutes later, at some risk to life and limb, he was at the caboose steps to assist Mamie to alight.

As the train gathered speed again, conductor and brakeman shouted back good wishes; then the rumble died away in the distance, and the train disappeared in the morning mist.

"Well, and now what?" asked Jack Welsh, looking down at his daughter.

Something in her face arrested his gaze, a certain strained and fixed expression, as though she were gazing inward instead of outward, as though she were stretching every sense to catch the sound of some inward voice, faint and far-away.

Jack felt a little shiver creep along his spine and up over his scalp, as he noted that fixed gaze.

"Well, and now what?" he asked again. "What is it you're listenin' for, Mamie?"

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“ His voice,” she answered, almost in a whisper.
“ ’Twill guide us.”

“ Surely,” protested Jack, “ you don’t expect — ”

But without waiting for him to finish, Mamie turned abruptly away from the railroad, and plunged into the strip of woodland which stretched beside it. There was no semblance of a path, but she hurried forward without pausing, and at the end of a few minutes they came to a road. Without an instant’s hesitation, Mamie turned eastward along it.

“ Toward Schooley’s,” Jack muttered to himself.
“ That’s all right. But how the dickens did she know it was here? ”

Mamie, meanwhile, looking neither to the right nor left, hurried along the road as fast as her feet would carry her. It was hard and rutted and anything but easy walking, yet the girl seemed to take no account of the roughness of the way, and Jack, panting and stumbling along behind, marvelled at the ease with which she hastened on. The sun had not yet risen, and gray cold mist of the morning still lingered among the trees. To the superstitious Irishman there seemed to be something ghostly and supernatural in the air; he felt that some mysterious and unseen influence was at work, and the thought brought a cold sweat out across his forehead. Yet never for an instant did he think of trying to stop her or of turning back himself.

Then suddenly, from afar off, Jack’s ears caught

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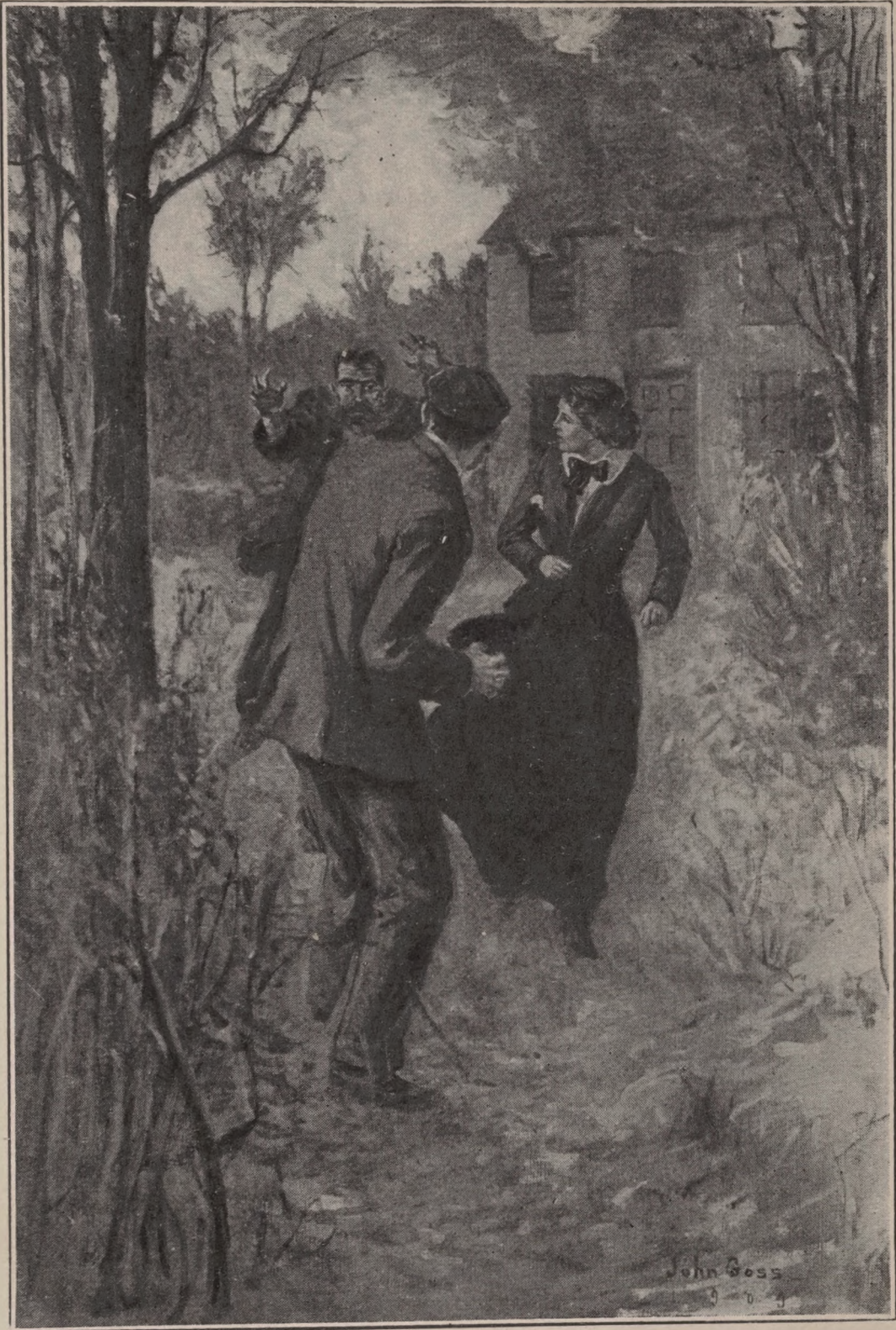
the sound of a faint singing or crying, that rose and fell in a sort of weird cadence, impossible to describe.

“What’s that?” he cried, and stopped short; but instead of pausing, Mamie broke into a run, and would have been out of sight in a moment had not Jack followed at top speed. In the end, his strength and agility told even against the strange spirit that possessed her, and he gained her side just as they reached the edge of a clearing, in the midst of which stood an old stone house.

“Good God! It’s afire!” gasped Jack, and, indeed, a black swirl of smoke was pouring from the broken windows at the front of the house, lighted redly here and there from instant to instant by a tongue of flame. “Wait, Mamie,” he added, grasping her arm as she started forward. “What ’r you goin’ t’ do?”

“He’s there!” Mamie cried, shaking him away, and without another word, she started toward the house.

Jack, gritting his teeth tight together, followed her. There was need of courage, for that weird sing-song chanting still persisted, and as they neared the house, a strange figure appeared around the corner — a squat, deformed figure, surmounted by a hideous face and great shock of dirty hair. It was dancing in a clumsy and ungainly fashion and was emitting from time to time the hoarse shouting which had set Jack’s nerves on edge.



“ THEN, WITH A HOARSE YELL OF RAGE, HURLED
HIMSELF UPON THEM.”

“C. Q. D.”

For an instant, the fellow did not perceive them; then, as his blood-shot eyes rested upon them, he stood for a breath as though carved in stone, and then, with a hoarse yell of rage, hurled himself upon them.

How Mamie escaped that savage onrush, she never knew. Jack had a confused recollection of seeing her spring aside to escape the madman's swinging arms, and in the next instant he found himself grappling with him, hurled backward off his feet, with great, hairy hands tearing at his throat. He felt himself helpless as a child in this powerful and cruel grasp, and his heart turned faint within him as he stared upward into the convulsed and hideous face glaring down at him. He dashed his fists against it, with almost as little effect as though he had dashed them against a rock, and ever those hands at his throat tightened and tightened. The world danced red before him — it was no use — no use —

Then, suddenly, a thought flashed lightning-like into his brain — if he failed her now, Mamie would be left alone with this monster — at his mercy —

Mad with rage, fairly foaming at the mouth, fired with a strength almost superhuman, Jack twisted his assailant to one side and tore his hands from his throat. One full breath of the cold air — it was all he had time for, before those hands closed upon him again. This was no human being, he told himself despairingly; it was a monster against

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which he could not hope to prevail; it wasn't fair to put a man up against a thing like this; nobody could blame him if he failed — but Mamie — there was Mamie —

His hand, flung out convulsively, touched something hard and round; mechanically he grasped it — mechanically he struck with it at the face above him — once — twice — thrice. And he felt the hands at his throat relax, saw dimly the savage countenance running red with blood, felt the great body lurch heavily forward across him — and lay gasping for breath, too weak, for the moment, to throw it off.

But only for a moment; then, twisting the body to one side, he staggered to his feet and stared first at it and then at the boulder he still grasped in his hand; and not till then did he understand what had happened — by what a slender chance he had been saved — and not he alone, but Mamie —

Mamie! He turned to look for her. She was nowhere in sight, and forgetting all else, he staggered forward toward the burning house. He tried the front door and found it fastened, shook at it savagely without effect, and then hastened around the house to the rear.

The back door was open, a flood of smoke pouring from it. And as he stared stupidly at it, he saw a nebulous figure struggling through it.

The sight brought his senses back, brought his strength back. He sprang forward, and in another

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moment, he and Mamie, between them, had dragged Allan West out into the open air, bleeding, bound, unconscious.

“ What they been doin’ to the boy? ” cried Jack, a white-hot rage almost choking him. “ Have they kilt him — have the cowards kilt him? ”

“ Oh, no; oh, no! ” sobbed Mamie, dropping on her knees beside him. “ Oh, look, dad, they’ve tied his hands and feet.”

“ The scoundrels! ” and Jack, whipping out his knife, had the bonds severed in an instant. “ His head’s all bloody,” he added, “ an’ look how that rope’s cut his wrists! Good God! What kind o’ fiends — ”

But Mamie, with more self-control than he, laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

“ Don’t, dad,” she said. “ Don’t think of that now. Time enough afterwards.”

“ You’re right,” and Jack mastered himself by a mighty effort.

“ We must get some water,” said Mamie, and then as she looked down at the white, bruised, unconscious face, a wave of misery swept over her, a suffocating sense of her own helplessness. “ We must do something! ” she cried wringing her hands in anguish. “ We must — oh! — ”

She stopped suddenly, and pressed her hands against her wildly-beating heart, for Allan’s eyes slowly unclosed and he lay looking up at her. Then his face brightened into a smile, and an instant

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later twitched with the agony the slight movement cost him. His eyes were caught by the cloud of smoke drifting upward from the house, and his expression changed from agony to horror.

“We must get the others,” he gasped, and tried to rise.

“No, no,” protested Mamie, her arms about him.
“Lie still — you must —”

But Allan had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

THEY tell the story yet on the P. & O., and, indeed, everywhere that railroad men foregather — they tell it with shining eyes and fast-beating hearts — how Jack Welsh, grasping in an instant the meaning of Allan's words, tied his handkerchief over mouth and nose, and fought his way inch by inch into that burning house, crawling on hands and knees with his face close to the floor where the smoke was thinnest — fought his way up the stairs and from room to room, until he found the one where five men lay, bound and senseless, on the floor; and they tell how he dragged them one by one to the open air, feeling the hot floor tremble under him toward the end, and himself falling unconscious beside the last man as he dropped him to the ground.

They tell the story with the proud consciousness that this man was one of themselves, and that what he did was done in the way of duty, with no thought of fame or reward, without pausing to count the risk.

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But even this heroism might have been of small avail, had not Reddy Magraw at that instant come upon the scene. Let him tell the story, as he told it next day to Mrs. Welsh.

"You know, whin I come down to your house the first thing in the mornin' an' found Jack had gone out to Schooley's, I was purty mad, fer we had kind of arranged t' go out there together, 'if Allan didn't show up; an' it didn't seem t' me that he was playin' just fair, though o' course I understand now that he didn't have time t' call me. Well, I made up my mind I'd git out there as quick as I could, so I hopped the first train I could ketch, which was second ninety-eight, and I reckon I must have jumped off not more'n half an hour after Jack an' Mamie did — though mind you, you hadn't said anything about Mamie goin' along, an' I reckon I know why," and here he stopped for a long look deep into Mrs. Welsh's eyes.

"Go ahead with the story," she said. "Though I don't say you ain't right."

"O' course I'm right," said Reddy, confidently. "Well, as I was sayin', I got off the train an' wandered around fer some time, an' then struck the road an' started t' foller it; an' purty soon I seed smoke over the tree-tops an' after that I didn't loiter none, I tell you.

"Well, sir, when I run around the corner o' that house, I purty nigh dropped dead in my tracks. There on the ground lay about a dozen men, as it

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seemed to me; there was the lunatic, an' a sight he was, with his face all covered with blood; an' there was Jack, an' his face was covered with blood, too, but not his own, the lunatic's; and there was Allan West, lookin' deader 'n a salt mackerel; there was five other fellys, some a-layin' nice an' still, an' some kind o' squirmin' around an' moanin'; an' there was Mamie, with Allan's head in her lap a-lookin' most dead herself; an' when I see her settin' there, I tell you my heart jest seemed to swell up inside me like it was a-goin' t' bust.

“ Well, I didn't know no more what to do than a rabbit. There was eight men whose lives depended on me, more or less; not that I'd 'a' cared about the lunatic, but even without him there was seven, an' me no doctor, neither. But Mamie certainly did show what was in her. Where she learned it I don't know, but she set me t' pumpin' them fellers' arms up an' down n' blowin' down their throats — Jack an' Allan first — an' it wasn't a great while till Jack came around. He was kind o' weak an' giddy, but not fer long; an' in ten or fifteen minutes, we had three others all right; an' jest about then, the lunatic began to come to, so we tied his hands an' feet t' make sure he didn't git away, or sneak up on any of us from behind an' cave our heads in. An' when he did come to, he laid there an' cussed somethin' frightful. I wanted t' hit him with the rock ag'in, but Mamie said no, to gag him, an' we stuffed his mouth full

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of his own dirty clothes, an' I guess he wished he'd kept 'em cleaner.

"But what worried us most of all was Allan. He jest laid there limp as a rag, an' Mamie workin' with him, purty nigh as white as he was."

"He can't die!" she kept saying to herself, over and over. "He can't die! It was God brought me here to save him, and he can't die now!"

The smoke and flames had burst up from the burning house, a beacon to all the country-side, and assistance was at hand ere long; strong hands and tender hearts; and presently two great wagons, bedded with straw to take conscious and unconscious alike to Schooley's, whither already a swift rider had been dispatched to summon aid from Wadsworth. And at Wadsworth, too, it may well be believed that no time was lost. A special was got ready in a hurry; doctors and nurses summoned; and when the little cavalcade reached Schooley's, the special was waiting there for it; and trained hands took over the work of relief.

Trained hands which worked swiftly and surely, and presently Allan opened his eyes and looked up at Mamie and smiled at her.

"Dear Mamie!" he murmured and closed his eyes and slept.

And the overwrought girl, conscious for the first time of her utter fatigue, reeled and would have fallen had not a strong arm caught her and carried her to a cot.

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I have wondered often what force it was drew Mamie from her bed, that morning, with sure knowledge of Allan's danger, and guided her to him along that rutted country road. The human mind is a strange and wonderful thing, with the seeming power of projecting itself through space, at times, and summoning loved ones or conveying a message to them.

Science seems to admit so much — or, at least, hesitates to deny it, in face of the evidence. And I have sometimes thought that, as Allan fell through the swirling smoke down that flight of stairs in the old stone house, his last conscious thought of Mamie, that thought somehow flashed to her across the miles that lay between them — a C. Q. D. signal of distress, as it were, from him to her, on the wonderful wireless of the mind.

At least, I have no other explanation — I only know it really happened just as I have told it here.

A great crowd was waiting when that special pulled in to Wadsworth — a crowd which cheered and cheered as Allan and Jack Welsh and Mamie were borne to the carriages which were in waiting; a crowd from which three women threw themselves upon the conductor and brakemen, weak but smiling; a crowd which cursed the idiot and would have torn him from his cot and committed I know not what violence but for the platoon of police,

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assisted by Stanley's specials, with Stanley himself, saturnine yet smiling, at the head of them.

For Stanley had returned and with him three prisoners and a wagon load of the richest silks ever shipped over an American railroad.

For the whole thing had been a case of robbery, after all, just as Stanley had suspected.

It had been carefully planned. The conspirators — old hands at the game — had learned that a shipment of silks of unusual richness had been made by a New York house to its jobbers in Saint Louis — had even received from some traitorous clerk the number of the car in which they were carried — had flagged the train, took conductor and brakemen prisoners, as they hurried forward to find out what the red light meant; had afterwards secured the engineer and fireman at the point of a revolver, extinguished the headlight, and looted the car at their leisure.

Then, after carefully sealing it up again so that the robbery would not be discovered until the car arrived at its destination, they had convoyed the prisoners to the old stone house, and committed them to the care of the half-witted monster they had brought with them from the city slums, with instructions that they be released in forty-eight hours, in which time they fancied they would be able to get well beyond reach of pursuit.

But they had not fully appreciated their confederate's crazed condition; they had not foreseen in

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what a horrible way he would carry out their instructions — give them credit for that. Nor had they foreseen that, within a very few hours, one of the keenest detectives in the middle west would be after them. They had thought such search as would be made would be for the missing men, and had hoped that, in the disorganized condition of the road, no very effective search could be made at all.

How Stanley followed them, like the blood-hound that he was, and finally ran them down need not be related in detail here. Stanley himself has told the story in the book of memoirs which he published after he had retired from active service. Once he had got his clue to them, the rest was a question of only a few hours; for a wagon heavily laden cannot proceed at any great rate of speed, nor can it pass along the roads unseen. He had sworn in two deputies at a farm house, and with their assistance, had no difficulty in surprising the robbers, as they jogged along a country road, thinking themselves quite secure. It was merely the matter of a levelled revolver and a stern command, and the application of certain lengths of rope to wrists and ankles. Then, turning the wagon about, he had driven in triumph back to Wadsworth, reaching there just at dawn.

And the first news he had heard was of Allan's disappearance. Puzzled and worried, he had seen his prisoners lodged safely in the county jail, and

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was just preparing to join the search himself, when news of the rescue flashed in from Schooley's.

Oh, but there were crazy people on Wadsworth's streets that day — people wild with excitement, telling the story over and over to each other, shaking each other's hands, repeating this detail or that as though they would never tire of hearing it. And the reporters! Well, the wildest stretch of their imaginations had conceived no such story as this! And they flashed it forth to the four points of the compass, so that, next morning, the whole country read the tale of the heroism of Jack Welsh and his daughter, Mamie.

It was perhaps, a year afterwards that the postman, one morning, brought a little registered package for John Welsh. Jack chanced to be at home that morning, and opened the package in considerable surprise, for registered packages were not of common occurrence with him.

"Why, what's this?" he said, and held up what appeared to be a medal of gold.

"Let's see it," said Mary, quickly, and examined it with eager eyes. "Why, look!" she cried. "On one side is a woman holdin' a wreath, an' on the other it says 'To John Welsh, for valour, February 2, 1906.' It's from the hayro fund!" she cried. "Jack —"

But Jack, looking very red and uncomfortable, had bolted from the house.

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"I does my work," he muttered angrily to himself, as he strode up the street, "but I ain't no hayro, an' what's more, I won't be one! What do they mean by sendin' me a medal? Confound their impudence, anyway. Why can't they leave a feller alone? I don't want their old medal!"

But Mary put it carefully away, and it is to this day her dearest treasure, to be shown proudly whenever the story of Jack's exploit is told — provided, always, that Jack isn't there!

And the robbers? Conviction followed, as a matter of course. There could be no doubt of their guilt, and in the end they saw the wisdom of confessing and throwing themselves upon the mercy of the court. The madman was consigned to an asylum for the criminally insane, where he remains to this day, occupying for the most part a strait-jacket and a padded cell, for he has never recovered from his lust of blood and instinct to murder.

CHAPTER XXIII

COMPLICATIONS

“WELL, well; wonders will niver cease!” remarked Reddy Magraw, contemplating the newspaper he held in his hand — Reddy safe once more in the bosom of his family, a hero if there ever was one, a czar whose slightest word was law — and, all in all, as true and loyal and honest and warm-hearted an Irishman as ever lived in this world.

“What is it?” asked Mrs. Magraw, looking over his shoulder.

“That,” answered Reddy, slapping the page with his open hand — a page overflowing with heavy headlines and further embellished with a group of photographs. “Now who’d ’a’ thought that anybody would iver want t’ put my ugly mug in the paper?”

“Sure ’tis no uglier than lots of others,” protested Mrs. Magraw, gazing at it fondly.

“Mebbe so; but this here picter don’t look nothin’ like what I see when I looks in the glass.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Magraw, examining it crit-

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ically, "it ain't jest what I'd call a perfect likeness; but the eyes are yours an' the nose an' the mouth."

"If they are, they ain't put together right," said Reddy. "I've often wondered how a criminal could git away when the papers all over the country was printin' his picter, but I understand now. If I'd done somethin' an' was runnin' away an' was arrested on suspicion, I could prove by that picter that they'd got the wrong man."

"Well, anyways," said Mrs. Magraw, "we gits half a dozen cabinets fer lettin' 'em take it."

"'Twas real generous," agreed Reddy. "But I wish they was of the baby. I niver thought that I'd iver ag'in face a cammery. The last picter I had took, darlint, was whin I was courtin' ye."

"Yes, an' I've got it yet, as ye know," said Mrs. Magraw, "an' a love of a picter it is."

"All that I raymimber about it is that me pants was very tight an' me shoes was killin' me," said Reddy, with a smile of reminiscence. "However, I was ready an' willin' to suffer any torture — even to cuttin' off me toes if ye thought me feet too big."

"As if I iver looked at yer feet! It was in your honest blue eyes that I looked, Reddy Magraw, an' nowheres else."

"Well, I reckon we didn't either of us make no mistake, darlint," said Reddy comfortably. "We ain't niver been bothered by a bank account, 'tis true; but nayther have we starved or gone naked."

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Mrs. Magraw patted him on the shoulder as a token of her approval of the sentiment.

"Let's see the other picters," she said. "There's Jack Welsh an' Stanley — trust him t' have his picter ready."

"Yes," chuckled Reddy, "an' anybody could recognize it a mile off by the nose."

"But where's Allan?"

Reddy chuckled again.

"Didn't have none; neither did Mamie — at least, that's what they said. But that didn't trouble most o' the papers none. They jest went ahead an' made 'em up. One feller must 'a' cut his picter o' Mamie out of a fashion paper, an' another used one of them skinny magazine girls, with their hair all a-flyin' around their faces. An' Allan — he looks like one of them young hayroes from the ready-made suit advertisements."

"An' does that look like the house?" asked Mrs. Magraw, indicating a building, with smoke and flames pouring from it in a truly terrifying manner, which further ornamented the newspaper's account of the rescue.

"Well," said Reddy, cautiously, "it does in a gineral way. It's got four walls an' a roof an' some windeys. Furder 'n that I wouldn't keer t' go."

"An' have ye read the story?"

"Yes; I've read it. An' a very purty story it is — a very purty work of the imagination. You

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should read it, an' see what a liar yer husband is. I allers did admire them newspaper felleys. T' hear them tell the story, you'd think they was right on the scene — an' them that was there can't recognize the place."

"Well," said Mrs. Magraw, in amazement, "I allers thought I could believe what I saw in the papers. What'll I do now?"

"Do as I do, darlint," replied her husband; "read the papers not fer instruction but fer entertainment."

The story of the abandoned train and the eleventh hour rescue of its crew was a nine days' wonder. There was the hearing of the case, the robbers' confession, the lapse into violent insanity of the murderous idiot, the serious condition of two of the crew, and of the young chief-dispatcher who had risked his life searching for them. All these kept up the interest from day to day, adding new fuel to the flames, and the enterprising reporters made the most of them. The two brakemen recovered, however, in a few days, but nearly a week had elapsed before the doctor, coming down from the room where Allan West lay, pronounced him out of danger.

"Careful nursing is all he needs now," he said, "and I know he'll get that."

"You kin be sure of it," said Mary. "This ain't the first time he's needed it an' got it."

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"I know that," and the doctor smiled. "It was I, you know, who took that bullet out of him and who fixed those broken ribs. He's surely had his share."

"An' every time," said Mary, with spirit, "it was a-doin' some other man's work — a-doin' some-thin' he thought was his duty, where the other man would most likely have runned away."

It was a very white and shaky, but thoroughly cheerful boy who smiled up at Mary Welsh five minutes later, when she mounted the stairs with the good news.

"Though it's more 'n you deserve," she added, with simulated wrath; "for ever pokin' your nose in where you ain't no business to."

"What!" protested Allan, "would you have had me let those five poor fellows burn to death!"

"No; but when they's detective work t' do, let the detective do it. What's Stanley for?"

"He was busy doing something else. And that reminds me — I must see him right away."

"Right away, indade!" cried Mary, with an indignant snort. "Next week, mebbe, if the doctor —"

"Then I guess I'll have to get up and hunt him," said Allan, and made a movement as though to rise.

"Lay still; lay still," said Mary hastily, "an' I'll send fer him," but Allan, smiling to himself,

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could hear her grumbling all the way down the stairs.

Stanley lost no time in answering the summons, though Mrs. Welsh had tried to persuade him to refuse to come, or, at least, to postpone his visit until the next day.

"The lad's in no shape to see you," she said, over the telephone, "but I had t' promise t' tell you, or he'd 'a' been climbin' out o' bed, an' him scarce able t' stand."

"I've got to come then, ma'am," said Stanley politely, but with great positiveness. "I've got to obey my superior officer. Besides, I've pretty near got to see him, anyway. I was goin' to come around in the mornin' myself."

"Well, come on then, an' bad cess to ye!" said Mary, and five minutes later he was at the door. "Now don't you go to excitin' the lad," she added, before she let him in.

"I won't, ma'am," Stanley promised meekly. "I'll be a reg'lar soothin' syrup. It'll do him good to see me — it really will."

"Huh!" grunted Mary, "that's more 'n it does me!"

But she let him in reluctantly, and led him upstairs to Allan's bedroom.

"I'll give you two ten minutes," she announced, and closed the door behind her.

Stanley, grinning, drew a chair up to the bedside and sat down.

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"Something of a Tartar," he observed.

"Yes, bless her, where I'm concerned. She's the best woman on earth and the biggest hearted. Now, what's the news?"

"Well, sir," said Stanley, crossing his legs deliberately, "this big sensation sort of took people's minds off the strike, and the situation hasn't been watched as close as it might have been. I've had to be away a good deal, attendin' the hearin' an' lookin' after things, and I kind of think some of the strikers got at our men."

"How could they do that?"

"I suspect one of my men of givin' us the double-cross — I fired him to-day."

"But what makes you think the strikers got at the men?"

"Well, three more pulled out yesterday without waitin' fer their pay, and I hear they joined the brotherhood last night."

Allan's face cleared.

"If that's all!" he said. "I guess we can spare three men. If no more than that leave us, it shows the men are pretty well contented. Has Mr. Schofield or Mr. Plumfield been here?"

"No," Stanley answered, "and from what I hear, they ain't likely to be. They've both got their hands full. Somebody tried to set fire to the stock-yards the other night and pretty near succeeded — in fact, did start a lively blaze, but it was discovered and put out before much damage was done

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— and mighty lucky it was that the night wasn't a windy one. But ever since, Mr. Schofield has had to patrol the whole approach to Cincinnati, a matter of five or six miles."

"Yes — and what about Mr. Plumfield?"

"Well," said Stanley, "the same night, one of the track walkers happened to find a big dynamite bomb on the Parkersburg bridge and dumped it over into the river just in time. That means more patrollin' at that end."

"But who did it? Who started the fire and who placed the bomb?"

"You can search me! The strikers say it wasn't them, and the brotherhood is offering a reward of a thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the guilty parties. I guess, though, their money's in no danger," Stanley added, with a grin.

"You mean you think the strikers did it?" asked Allan, quickly.

"I don't suppose anybody's doin' it fer their health."

"But if that's their game, what's to prevent them from blowing up a bridge or culvert somewhere out on the line any time they want to? We can't guard the whole right-of-way."

"There ain't a thing on earth to prevent them," answered Stanley, cheerfully. "You know as well as I do, that there never is any thing to prevent any tramp or bum or scoundrel blowin' up a bridge at any time — but they never do — at least, mighty

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seldom, though to hear some of 'em talk, you'd think all they wanted was half a chance t' blow up the whole world. So I don't look for anything of that sort now. In the first place, scoundrels of that kind won't operate far from a base of supplies, which means a grog-shop. An' in the second place, they've got to operate in a mob, for they're the biggest cowards on earth — and that means a big town. I take back what I said a while ago. I don't think the strikers put that bomb on the bridge — I think it was some Russian or Italian anarchist from the Parkersburg coal mines or steel works. There's plenty of 'em there. An' I ain't so dead sure they started the stockyards fire, either. I had a talk with Simpson, their special delegate, yesterday, and he seems to be a pretty decent sort of feller. I really believe he's tryin' to prevent trouble, and I could see that he was considerable down in the mouth about the strike. I think he's gittin' cold feet and would be glad to back out, if he could. I figger it out this way — the brotherhood's split up. The old, conservative men, headed by Simpson, want to avoid trouble; the young, hot-headed ones, headed by Bassett, are sp'ilin' for a fight. And they're roundin' up all the toughs they can find to help them."

"Well," said Allan, with a sigh of relief, "they won't be able to find many here to help them, and that's a blessing!"

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Stanley;

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“but I don’t think there’ll be any trouble here — not for a few days, anyway.”

“A few days?” echoed Allan. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean,” answered Stanley, slowly, “that I don’t like the looks of things. There’s too many strangers in town.”

“Too many strangers?”

“Yes — too many strangers. Why, the saloons are full of the toughest lookin’ lot of men you ever saw. Where’d they come from — that’s what I want to know — and what’s their business — and who’s payin’ for their whiskey?”

“I don’t understand you yet, Stanley,” said Allan, a little impatiently. “Tell me straight out what you’re afraid of.”

“I’m afraid that them fellers are bein’ brought in here to cause trouble,” answered Stanley, bluntly. “And I believe that Bassett’s at the bottom of the whole thing. And furthermore I believe he’s got that little devil of a Hummel helpin’ him.”

“Hummel? Have you seen him?”

“Seen him! I guess not! If I did, I’d have him behind the bars so quick ’twould make his head swim. But I’ve got to have some more men, and the trouble is that the more I get, the more danger there is of gettin’ some strike sympathizers among them. I think I’d better patrol the yards and track clear through to the city limits.”

“So do I,” Allan agreed. “I’d keep everybody

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out of the yards and off the right-of-way who hasn't business there. And if there's any sign of trouble, let me know at once."

"I will," Stanley promised; "I'm mighty glad to have somebody to talk things over with. I've felt like I was goin' to bust the last few days. And I'm glad you're gettin' better."

"Thank you," Allan answered. "It's just a question now of getting my strength back."

"Well, don't you worry none; let me do that," and the detective took his leave, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Welsh, who had been fuming outside the door for the last five minutes, without daring to break in upon the conversation.

"And now," said Allan, cheerfully, when she returned from showing Stanley out, "I wish you'd call Tom Murray, our chief lineman, and tell him I want my instrument put on a board, so that I can use it here in bed. Of course," he added, as Mary frowned mutinously, "I could get up and go over there to the table, but I thought maybe you'd rather I stayed in bed."

"Yes," said Mary grimly, "it'll save us the trouble o' puttin' you there after you've kilt yer-self," but she went and summoned the lineman, and in half an hour, the little instrument was removed from the table to a board, and Allan was working it with his left hand, for his right arm was incapacitated by reason of the broken collar-bone.

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Ever since the day when he and Jim Anderson had rigged up a little private line for the study of telegraphy, he had kept an instrument in his room, connected with headquarters, so that he could be called at any hour of the night, without anyone else in the house being disturbed. For he had long since acquired that sixth sense of the telegrapher, which responds to its call, even though its possessor may be sound asleep, and awakens him much as an alarm clock might.

So now, with the instrument under his hand, he first called up the offices and had a little chat with the dispatcher who was looking after his work as chief — work which was not exacting since traffic was so light; and then, calling Cincinnati, he asked for Mr. Schofield. But Mr. Schofield was out somewhere, and Allan was forced to content himself for the time being with the assurance of the man who answered him that everything seemed to be all right.

He pushed the instrument away, at last, and lay back on the pillow, wearier than he cared to confess, realizing how far from strong he was. The shock of his terrible experience was one from which he would probably be long in completely recovering, but he set his teeth and resolved that he would not be chained to his bed an instant longer than was absolutely necessary.

He dozed off, after a time, half-sleeping, half-waking, and Mary, opening the door and glancing

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in at him, closed it softly and went away. He heard her and smiled to himself and sank deeper among the pillows.

It was not exactly a dream that he had as he lay there — it was rather a vision — a living over again of the incidents of that terrible day — living them over, though, calmly; looking at them from the outside, as though they were happening to someone else. He saw himself struck down in the empty stable; saw his assailant stoop above him, and finally, after reconnoitring to make sure he was not observed, drag his victim to the house, in through the back door, and up the stairs to a room on the floor above.

He saw himself lying there unconscious, and fear gripped his heart lest he might die there without awaking; but the still figure stirred presently, and opened its eyes. In the cellar beneath the house, he could see a dim shape moving about, illumined only by the light of a dirty lantern. It was gathering a pile of rubbish together and adding to it some rotten boards which it tore from some shelving in one corner. Then the figure mounted to the ground floor and collected a similar heap there; then to the floor above, where it entered the room in which he lay. He heard himself talking to it, questioning it, heard its savage responses; then he saw it go out and shut the door and proceed to another room near by where five figures lay bound upon the floor. They cursed it,

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railed at it, implored it; but the fiend only laughed sardonically and left them.

Then it descended leisurely to the floor below, and from a cupboard produced some scraps of food, which it proceeded to consume, after which it returned to the stable, extinguished the lantern, lay down upon its bed of straw and slept. How long it slept, Allan could not tell, but at last it arose, gathered the straw under one arm, and with the lantern swinging from the other hand, returned to the house. A portion of the straw was added to the pile of rubbish in the cellar, and the rest of it to the pile on the floor above. Then, the idiot opened the lantern and poured over the pile the kerosene which remained in it. Finally, with a devilish leer, he struck a match and touched it to the straw.

For a moment he sat feeding the flames carefully, his face more demoniac than ever in the red shadows which danced over it. Then, closing the door, he proceeded to the cellar and set fire to the rubbish there, and, finally, left the house and sat down on a little hummock of earth outside. Allan watched the flame grow and grow, the straw throwing off a dense cloud of smoke as it burned; he saw himself awaken, crawl to the door, along the hall, to the stairs; saw himself pitch headforemost through the darkness —

“Mamie!” he cried. “Mamie!”

And he started awake to find Mamie’s arms about him, and her dear face above him —

CHAPTER XXIV

ALLAN FINDS HIS MATE

FOR an instant, Mamie bent above him, gazing down at him, her face very tender; then she made as though to draw away, but Allan threw his arm about her and held her tight.

“Is it a dream?” he asked, “or is it really you, Mamie?”

“Oh, it isn’t a dream,” she answered, laughing.

He drew a deep breath of relief as he looked up at her, and then glanced about the familiar room.

“I’ve dreamed so many times,” he said, “and always you were bending over me—a sort of guardian angel—‘guarding me, out of all the world.’”

Her colour heightened and her eyes grew bright.

“It’s sweet of you to say that,” she said.

“And you’re sure I’m not dreaming?”

“No—but you were; you were crying out—”

“Yes—I thought I was still in that old stone house. And I was crying for you, Mamie!”

“For me?”

“Yes, for you—just as I have done a dozen times before.”

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He stopped for an instant and gazed up into her eyes, and his lips were trembling.

“Do you know why, Mamie?” he asked, at last. “Can’t you guess why?”

Something in his face brought the hot colour to her cheeks, and she struggled to free herself from his arm.

“Let me go, Allan,” she pleaded. “You mustn’t —”

“Not yet. Not just for a moment. Do you know what you are to me, Mamie? The dearest thing in life! And I’m going to kiss you.”

“No, no!” she cried. “Allan —”

But he drew her lips down to his — such tender lips they were, so sweet, so dewy.

“And I’m going to marry you as soon as I get well,” he announced, his cheek against hers. “And we’ll live happy ever after, like the prince and princess in the fairy tale. That is, of course, provided the princess is agreeable.”

She drew a quick, startled breath, and lay still for a moment, warm against his heart; then she drew his hands away, raised herself and looked down at him with shining eyes.

“Do you mean it, Allan?” she whispered.

“Mean it? I mean it as I never meant anything else. Put that little ear of yours down to my lips, Mamie. I want to tell you something.”

“What?” asked Mamie, her eyes luminous.

“Put your ear down.”

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And Mamie bent a pink ear to his lips.

"I love you!" he whispered into it, and kissed it.

Again a quick breath shook that gentle bosom — a breath of sheerest ecstasy — then, with a quick movement, Mamie turned her head and laid her lips to his.

"And I you!" she said. "And, oh, Allan, you have made me happy!"

"Nothing to what I am."

"Oh, yes," she contradicted, seriously. "Much happier. You see, I never thought that you — that I —"

"Well, go on."

"I never thought that I was good enough."

"Good enough! You're a thousand times too good. That's what worries me, Mamie."

"I — I thought maybe, after you were married, you — you'd let me keep house for you, or something of that sort, so that I could see you —"

"I won't listen!" cried Allan, and stopped her lips.

"Oh, but you must," she said, freeing herself, "because I want you to know. I would have been quite happy doing that."

"Poor little Cinderella!"

"But the Prince has come, and the slipper fits. I shall always believe in fairy tales, after this," she added, her eyes shining, "because I know one that's come true."

They were silent for a moment, too full of their

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new happiness for any need of words. Then she snuggled her cheek close to his.

"When did you begin to love me, Allan?" she whispered, shyly.

"That day when I picked you up from in front of the locomotive."

"Seriously, Allan; tell me."

"I don't know," he said, drawing back so that he could see her rosy, tender face. "I started long before I knew it — away back when you were a little girl, I guess. I can see now how it grew and grew and made its foundation more and more secure, so that there was no shaking it; but I never woke to it till that night I came home from Cincinnati and you met me at the door. Then it struck me all of a sudden, and it was all I could do to keep from taking you in my arms —"

Mamie gave a delighted little wiggle.

"I knew it!" she said. "I saw it — and — I'm ashamed to confess it, Allan!"

"To confess what?"

"How badly I wanted you to — and how I tried to make you."

He laughed delightedly.

"Really? Why, you little siren!"

"Yes; but then, you know, I'd loved you much longer than you had me."

"How much longer?"

"Oh, ages longer; since that very first time, I think. You know, I kissed you then."

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"Yes, I seem to remember something of the sort."

"Only, of course, at first," she added, "I didn't think about your loving anybody else, or care."

"You were afraid of that?"

"You did, you know," she said, accusingly.

"Not really, Mamie," he protested, earnestly. "Not like this — not in the least like this. Betty Heywood was right when she said I was never in love with her — it was with girls in general, but not with her."

"I don't know that that makes it any better," pouted Mamie.

"Oh, yes, it does; it isn't in the least like being in love with an individual. Mamie," he asked, suddenly, "I've never been able to understand. What was it led you to me out there in that old house?"

"My love," she answered, promptly. "I don't think it the least strange, Allan. When you fell down the stairs, you called me and I heard. How could I have helped but hear?"

"Yes; I suppose that was it," he agreed, holding her closer. "But it was wonderful just the same."

"I think anything else would have been wonderful. It seems to me the most natural thing in the world. I shall always hear, when you call me, Allan."

"Will you? Well, we'll see. When are we going to get married, Mamie?"

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"Oh," she said, and pulled herself away, and sat upright, with flaming cheeks. "Not for a long time — two years, anyway. You know, I'm only seventeen."

"You thought that was a great age, not so very long ago."

"It doesn't seem so great now — and since we know we love each other, what does anything else matter?"

"It matters a good deal. I'll see about it just as soon as I can get about."

"Do you know," she said, looking down at him critically, "I believe you're something of a tyrant?"

"I know I am," he laughed, joyously; "I'm a good deal of a tyrant. You'll see!"

"Maybe I won't marry you after all!"

"I'm not afraid. You're dying for me — come now, own up."

For an instant Mamie hesitated — the traditions of her sex held her back. Then she flung herself forward upon him and hugged him tight.

"I am — I am," she cried. "And it shall be whenever you say, Allan!"

And just then, Mary opened the door and looked in.

"Mamie," she began, and then stopped astonished at the sight that met her eyes.

But Mamie had rushed to her and thrown her arms around her neck and was holding her tight.

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"Oh, mummy, mummy!" she cried. "Guess! You could never guess! Allan — we're —"

She stopped, stammering with sheer joy, and Mary, taking her by the shoulders, held her off and looked at her — at the starry eyes, at the blushing cheeks, at the smiling lips; and then, for the first time in her life, Mary Welsh quite gave way, collapsed into a chair, threw her apron over her head and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Why, mummy!" cried Mamie.

"It's nothin'! It's nothin'!" sobbed that good woman. "Let — let me be — don't you see it's for joy, you foolish children," and the storm passing as quickly as it had come, she pulled her apron down again, and kissed them both. "It's the happiest day of my life — Oh, I have hoped for it and prayed for it — but I never thought — wait till I tell Jack! An' him out on th' road an' not comin' back till t'morrer night! Mamie," she added, eyeing her offspring sternly, "do you know where you ought t' be? You ought t' be down on your knees thankin' heaven fer such a man — the best an' kindest on God's green earth!"

"Oh, come!" protested Allan, laughing. "No, he's not; not by a good deal."

But Mary did not heed him.

"An' if ever," she continued, "you give him cause for sorrow or misgivin', you'll answer to me, young lady — that you will!"

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And then, suddenly relenting, she caught Mamie to her and kissed her again.

"An' now I guess I'd better take you away," she added. "You'll be excitin' the boy too much."

"Oh, nonsense!" Allan cried. "Exciting me, indeed! Don't you see I'm a hundred per cent. better — there never was such medicine. Take her away, and I'll go into a decline right off!"

"Well, I'll leave her, then," said Mary; "but mind you take your medicine!"

And she went out and closed the door after her.

Mamie came back and sat down by the bedside.

"I've got a lot to learn, you know, Allan," she began seriously. "There's the cooking —"

"Why, you're a splendid cook."

"Not nearly so good as mummy. And I wouldn't have you miss her cooking."

"Why, I won't miss anything, you little goose, if I have you. I'll have to look for a house. There's a new one going up right back on Second street — it looks pretty nice —"

But just then, his instrument began to call him.

"There's Mr. Schofield," he said, and answered, as Mamie handed the board up to him.

"How are you?" was the first question.

"Coming along fine," Allan answered. "Will be out in a day or two."

"That's great. We need you. Things here are in pretty bad shape, but I'm hoping they will calm

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down. All the trouble is caused by a lot of loafers, and I'm trying to find out who it is that's behind them. You heard about the fire at the stock-yards?"

"Yes, Stanley told me."

"We've got the men who did that, and intend to put them through, but I'm sure there's somebody back of them, and we're trying to get a confession."

"Do you think it's the strikers?"

"No; or if it is, it's a gang of the less scrupulous ones."

"That's what Stanley thinks. He says Bassett's at the head of it."

"That's a good idea — worth working on, anyway. Suppose you tell Stanley to have one of his best men keep an eye on Bassett. If he starts for Cincinnati, let me know and I'll have him shadowed at this end. How are things at Wadsworth?"

"Stanley was just here and reported everything quiet. He says he's worried, though, by a lot of tough-looking strangers who have showed up recently in the depot saloons."

"Well, don't take any chances. Swear in all the deputies you need. And keep everybody out of the yards."

"I've already ordered that. Have we men enough to run the trains?"

"We're a little short, but there's another squad coming on from the east to-night. There have been a lot here looking for jobs, but I'm afraid to hire

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them. Don't hire anybody at Wadsworth, unless you're sure of them. We must hold our men together. I think the strikers are getting tired and another week will see the end of it."

"I hope so."

"The only thing I'm afraid of and want to guard against is a flare-up at the end. And that's what I want you to watch for and try to prevent. Some of the young fire-eaters may feel so sore when they know they've lost the strike that they'll try to take it out on us."

"All right; and I'll get out myself just as soon as I can."

"Take your time — I don't want you to get a relapse. I've heard all about that adventure of yours. I'll tell you what I think about it when I see you."

"I didn't do anything. It was Jack Welsh and Reddy Magraw."

"I've heard about them, too. And what's this story about a young damsel leading the rescuers?"

"That was Welsh's daughter."

"I want to meet her when I get back to Wadsworth."

"All right; I'll introduce you," and Allan chuckled.

"What is it, Allan?" asked Mamie. "I know you're saying something about me by the way you're laughing."

But Allan silenced her with a wave of the hand.

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"You know what you ought to do," added Mr. Schofield.

"What?"

"Marry her."

"I'll think about it," answered Allan, chuckling again.

"Keep me posted about Bassett."

"I will."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," clicked Allan, and pushed the instrument away.

"I see I'll have to learn telegraphy," said Mamie. "I can't have you talking about me to people right before me and me not understanding a word of it! What was he saying?"

"He said he wanted to meet the heroine."

"Yes; and what else?"

"He said it was up to me to marry her."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him she was willing, but I hadn't made up my mind."

"Yes," said Mamie, reflectively, looking sternly at his laughing face, "I'll certainly have to learn telegraphy."

"There's only three words you need know," said Allan. "Here they are," and, finger on key, he clicked off slowly, .. — .. .- -

"And what do they mean?"

"'I love you,' " he answered.

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“I think I like them better spoken,” said Mamie; “and I suppose I’ll have to forgive you.”

Joy is a great restorer, and the next twenty-four hours worked a big improvement in Allan’s condition. The wound on his head was healing nicely, and he had almost recovered from the weakness which the loss of blood had occasioned. A broken collar-bone is at no time a very dangerous injury, and in the case of this young and vigorous fellow it had already begun to knit, though, of course, his shoulder would stay in splints for a fortnight yet. From the general shock which he had suffered, his strong young body rallied quickly, and on the afternoon of the day following the conversation just recorded, the doctor announced that he might leave his bed and sit up a while.

“And to-morrow, doctor,” Allan added, “I’m going down to the office.”

“We’ll see,” said the doctor, laughing. “I don’t say you sha’n’t go; but I hope it won’t be necessary. I’d like to keep you quiet here for a day or two yet — you’ll gain by it in the end.”

It was in his chair that Stanley found him when he came to make his report.

“No special developments,” he said. “A few more strangers, but none of them has offered to give any trouble. I got the police to railroad a few of them out of town. I think the mayor’s seein’

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a light. You know, this strike hasn't been conducted any too well — or maybe it was because our side of it has been handled right — but the strikers are sort of losin' heart. Bassett's made a blamed fool of himself since it started. He's been drunk most of the time, and had a fight last night, at the lodge meetin' with Jim Adams, one of the oldest engineers on the road. You know he's always had a grudge ag'in Adams, anyway — he's tried t' do fer him afore this."

"Yes," said Allan. "We've always suspected he tried to send him through the Jones Run bridge by running past it that night it was on fire."

"I don't doubt he did," said Stanley. "Anyway, he got white hot last night. I hear that even the special delegate sided ag'in him, and told him that if it happened ag'in, he'd be fired from the brotherhood. And I hear that Bassett's drunker'n ever to-day, and threatens t' cause more trouble at the meetin' to-night. If he does, I think the jig's up."

"Well, we won't count on it. Have you got enough men to patrol the yards thoroughly?"

"I've got thirty — that ought to be enough. I've got a string all around the yards. Nobody can git in who can't show his business."

"Not even after night?"

"Well, o' course, my men ain't owls, but they'll keep open what eyes they've got."

"Are the trains moving all right?"

"On the dot — and another thing — I hear that

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the conductors have definitely refused to join the strike. I guess they see which way the wind's blowin'."

"I'm glad of that — if all the brotherhoods were as sensible."

"Oh, they'll make you pay fer it the next time they have a grievance," said Stanley, with a grin. "They'll remind you how they stood by you, and so will the brakemen."

Evening came, and with it, Jack. Allan heard him coming up the stairs, and called to him to come in before he had time to knock.

"Come in and sit down," said Allan. "How's everything out on the line?"

"Foine as silk. An' it certainly does me good t' see you settin' up. That doctor's all right."

"Oh, it wasn't the doctor," cried Allan. "Jack, don't you know — didn't they tell you?"

Jack's honest face was a-gleam, as he took Allan's outstretched hand.

"Yes," he said, "they told me. An' it's a happy man I am, Allan West — happier 'n I ever thought I could be!"

"And it's a happy man I am, Jack Welsh," said Allan. "You can trust her to me, Jack," he added, earnestly. "I'll be good to her."

"Don't I know it, boy! It's a lucky girl she is — an' a lucky family. It's — it's — Allan, boy, if I'd thought an' thought, I couldn' 'a' thought of

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anything that would make me happier. Who's that?" he added, as a heavy step sounded on the stair.

"Faith, an' it's Reddy Magraw!" cried a familiar voice. "Your old woman was jest tellin' me, Jack, when I come in t' ask after th' boy, there — tellin' me about him an' Mamie. An' I jest couldn't go away without seein' both of you. Jack Welsh," he added, sternly, "what have ye got t' say?"

"Nothin'. I'm too full t' say anything, Reddy."

"Well, then, I'll say it fer ye," said Reddy; "an' it's this. I'd rather have a darter of mine wife to that boy there than t' the king of England. Yes, an' if I had a dozen darters, an' he wanted 'em, I'd say take 'em — an' I'd be sorry I hadn't more!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE DOWNFALL OF BASSETT

SINCE the beginning of the strike, the engineers' headquarters had remained open continually, and, in addition to the informal meetings during the day, a formal meeting was held every evening to discuss the situation. These meetings, which the firemen also attended, had started out peacefully enough, but two factions had soon developed, one led by Simpson, the special delegate, and the other by Rafe Bassett. The feeling between these factions had steadily increased in bitterness, and had culminated the evening before, as Stanley had reported to Allan, in an assault by Bassett on one of the oldest engineers in the road's employ.

Simpson, early recognizing Bassett's violent and quarrelsome disposition, had foreseen this development, and had lost no opportunity to strengthen himself with the conservative element and to gain its confidence. He had worked wisely and well, and the consequence was that Bassett's following had melted away so rapidly that Simpson at last felt himself strong enough to administer a stinging warning to the offender.

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In this victory, Simpson had been greatly aided by the course of events. Many of the engineers had opposed the strike at the outset, but had been overborne by the younger element; as the days passed, more and more, under Simpson's careful guidance, had come to acknowledge that the strike was a mistake and that public opinion was turning against them. The older men were especially outspoken in their expressions of regret, and while many of the younger men kept up a semblance of contentment, it was plainly to be seen that they, too, were growing uneasy. Almost the only one who was still openly pleased with the strike was Bassett himself.

The discontent with the situation had found expression on the floor of the lodge the night before, when Jim Adams had suggested that a committee be appointed to wait upon the officials of the road, and see whether an agreement to end the strike could not be reached. It was this suggestion which had led to Bassett's assault and to the subsequent warning and reprimand which Simpson had given him.

In consequence of all this, everyone felt that affairs were reaching a crisis, and the lodge room was even more crowded than usual, this evening, as the hour for the meeting approached. The men gathered in little groups and discussed in low tones the scene of the evening before. It was evident that a new spirit had come over the men, and more

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than one stated that it was his intention to approve the suggestion made by Adams the night before, and that he would not allow Rafe Bassett to roar him down. But none of them cared to provoke unnecessarily Bassett's open enmity, for he was universally recognized as a dangerous man, and when, at last, he swaggered into the room, plainly under the influence of liquor, an uneasy silence fell upon the crowd.

The meeting was called to order, and Simpson arose to make a few announcements. He waited until Bassett, evidently spoiling for a fight, swaggered noisily to a chair near the stage.

"There is no change in the situation," he began. "The strike is progressing quietly —"

"Too blame quietly," Bassett broke in. "You'd think we was a lot o' Sunday school kids by the way we set around with our hands folded, actin' like sugar wouldn't melt in our —"

"Order! Order!" called the chairman, rapping with his gavel, and Bassett subsided, growling, into his chair.

"As I was saying," Simpson proceeded calmly, "the strike is progressing quietly. One good piece of news I have — the fellows who tried to set fire to the stock-yards have been arrested and turned out to be a couple of saloon bums, who never worked on a railroad, or anywhere else, and of course never belonged to the brotherhood. I'm mighty glad that this effectually clears the brother-

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hood of any suspicion of being implicated in the affair."

"How do you know they're the ones?" Bassett demanded.

"I understand they have confessed."

"Been given the third degree, I guess. Who's defendin' 'em?"

"I don't know, nor care. The brotherhood certainly won't defend them. If they haven't any money, counsel for them will be appointed by the court, I suppose, in the usual way."

"And they'll be railroaded to the pen, also in the usual way," sneered Bassett. "It makes me sick the way we go back on our friends."

"They're not our friends," said Simpson, sharply. "They're the worst enemies we've got. We're in no way responsible for them nor indebted to them."

"Ain't we?" and Bassett was on his feet again. "Where'd they git the whiskey they tanked up on afore they tackled the job? Who give it to them?"

"I don't know — some saloon-keeper, probably."

"No, it wasn't no saloon-keeper," cried Bassett, "an' you know it. What would a saloon-keeper be givin' away good whiskey fer? An' more'n that, where'd they git the twenty dollars that was found on each of 'em? Did a saloon-keeper give 'em that, too?"

"Since you seem to know so much about it,"

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said Simpson, with ominous calmness, "suppose you tell us."

"All right, I *will* tell you!" yelled Bassett, his self-control suddenly slipping from him. "Though I won't be tellin' you no news, for all your standin' there lookin' so goody-good. It's sneaks like you an' Jim Adams, what want t' go crawlin' back lickin' the boots of the railroad, that disgusts me with the brotherhood."

"Sneak yourself!" cried Adams, jumping to his feet and starting for Bassett, but two of his friends seized him and held him back.

"Let him come on!" shouted Bassett, fairly purple. "I'll fix him this time — I've been wantin' to fer years. Let him come on!"

But Adams was pulled panting back into his chair.

"Did you hear what he said?" he demanded of those about him. "Did you hear what he said? He as good as admitted he tried to do fer me that night at Jones Run bridge!"

But they weren't listening to him; they were listening to Bassett, who, fairly livid with rage, had turned back to Simpson.

"Yes," he shouted, "goody-goody sneaks like you an' Adams — standin' there lettin' on you don't know who it was put them poor devils up to firin' the stock-yards!"

"I've already asked you to tell me," repeated Simpson, quietly.

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"It was two members of this lodge!" yelled Bassett, quite beside himself. "It was two members of this lodge what give the whiskey an' the cash, an' they knowed what they was doin', too!"

The place was in an uproar; angry voices demanded the names of the offending members, denials were shouted across the room, fists were shaken; but the chairman finally succeeded in beating down the din until Simpson's voice could be heard again. His face was flushed and there was a dangerous light in his eyes as he turned to Bassett, who had subsided into his seat again.

"Mr. Bassett," he began, "you have said too much not to say more. I demand the names of those two men."

But Bassett had already said more than he had intended to say, and heartily regretted his hasty tongue.

"I ain't no tale-bearer," he protested. "I know what I know; but it don't go no further."

"You refuse to tell?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then," said Simpson, firmly, "by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Grand Lodge, I suspend you from membership in the brotherhood until a hearing of this case can be had."

"What!" yelled Bassett, on his feet again, his face purple. "Suspend me! Why, you — you snake! Boys," he shouted, "do you stand fer this?"

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It's Nixon over ag'in! Oh, they're all rotten! I tell you those fellers layin' in jail down at Cincinnati ought t' be looked after by the brotherhood — I tell you why — I speak as a man to men — I don't believe in lettin' some corporation-owned Hamilton County judge railroad them to the pen. It ain't right, an' every man of you knows it ain't right. But I ain't no informer — I won't say nothin' more — an' because I won't, this here whipper-snapper from headquarters says he'll suspend me. Boys, I tell you the Grand Lodge is rotten through an' through. It's owned by the railroads. It's time we turned the scoundrels out!"

It was a good talk, effectively delivered, and it carried some of the younger men with it, as was shown by the subdued growl which ran around the room. Not so very long before, it would have carried the whole lodge with it, but sentiment had changed. Simpson, who had gone through just such scenes before, never turned a hair.

"And I want to say to you," he said, "that the Grand Lodge is devoted to you, and you know it — deep down in your hearts, you know it. Yes, and I want to add that I think we made a mistake in consenting to this strike, and in my opinion the sooner we call it off the better. As to those fellows at Cincinnati, so far from defending them, the brotherhood has promised to pay, and will pay, a reward of five hundred dollars upon their convic-

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tion, and it will pay the same reward for the conviction of the scoundrel who tried to dynamite the bridge at Parkersburg.

"As for this man," he added, pointing to Bassett, "he is no longer a member of the brotherhood and will not be until he is re-instated — and if that ever happens, which I don't believe, it will certainly be against my advice. As this lodge has further business to transact, I would therefore ask Mr. Bassett to retire."

"Retire yourself!" shouted Bassett, now thoroughly enraged. "If you want me out, you'll have to put me out, an' I'd like to see you do it!"

"Oh, I'll do it, if necessary," retorted Simpson. "But before you go, I want to say one thing to you for all these men to hear. It's blackguards like you who bring discredit upon the brotherhood and upon unionism generally — blackguards who are always trying to get something they don't deserve, and to evade something they do deserve. It's blackguards like you who think the union cause is helped by violence, and who want every strike to be accompanied by violence. Now, apart from any consideration of right or wrong —"

"What is this, a sermon?" demanded Bassett, looking around with a raucous laugh — but it found no echo.

"Yes," retorted Simpson; "and a sermon you'll do well to listen to. Apart from any consideration of right or wrong, nothing hurts our cause like

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violence — I think we've found that out — and the fellow who advocates violence or assists in it is an enemy and not a friend. And I haven't the slightest doubt," he added, wheeling upon Bassett, "that it was this fellow here who was responsible for that fire at the stockyards."

Bassett, his face white and drawn with passion, could only sputter inarticulately for a moment. Then, by a mighty effort, he regained control of himself.

"You're pipin' a different tune," he sneered, "from what you did when you first come down here. Why? Have you been seen, like Nixon was? Have you got a wad of railroad money in your pocket?"

"Sergeant-at-arms," called Simpson, "this fellow is not a member of this lodge. Remove him, so that the meeting can proceed."

Then Simpson sat down and awaited the event with serene confidence. For, as has been stated, he had been in just such a position more than once before, and he had planned carefully to meet this crisis. The sergeant-at-arms, instructed beforehand in his duties, summoned two assistants and advanced upon Bassett. For a moment, it was evident that that individual meditated resistance; then, as he sized up the three stalwart men confronting him, he realized the futility of it.

"All right," he said; "I'll go. But don't put your hands on me — I won't stand that. An' I

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just want to say one thing: you'll all of you regret this night's work."

And catching up his overcoat, he followed the sergeant-at-arms to the door, which closed after him a moment later.

The night's experience had sobered him, but nevertheless he reeled slightly as he went down the stairs — not with intoxication, but with a kind of vertigo of rage. He paused at the foot of the stairs to recover himself.

"They framed it up on me!" he muttered to himself. "The hounds! To think of their framin' it up on me!"

And he got out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead with shaking hand. Then, entering the saloon on the ground floor of the building, he asked for two quart bottles of whiskey.

The bartender, an old acquaintance, ventured to protest.

"Look here, Rafe," he said, "you're goin' it too strong. Better let up a little, old man."

"Oh, this ain't fer me," answered Bassett, laughing grimly. "I'm givin' a little blow-out to-night. This is fer the company," and putting a bottle in each coat-pocket, he hurried from the place.

The bartender gazed after him speculatively, for there was a strangeness in his manner, a sort of menace, as of a man who has thrown down the gauntlet to society, regardless of the consequences, but other customers demanded attention, and the

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bartender soon forgot all about the incident. Could he have followed Bassett, he would have been more and more surprised; for the latter's path did not lead him home, nor to any place suggestive of a social function. Instead, he turned down the nearest alley, came out upon the railroad track and followed it toward the river. Once he passed a track-walker, but the latter did not recognize the dark figure apparently hurrying toward home.

The road ran past back yards, from which an occasional dog saluted him, crossed a street at an angle, skirted a row of tumble-down brick buildings, and then emerged upon the river bank, which it skirted for perhaps half a mile. Upon this bank, in the days when municipal sanitation was not what it now is, a number of slaughter-houses had been built, because of the convenience of running their refuse into the river. This had been stopped some years before, and the buildings, already decrepit and decayed, had fallen into a still more disreputable condition.

A high board fence surrounded the little stretch of ground in front of them, and before this Bassett paused, groped an instant, pulled aside a loose board and slipped through. He let the board slide into place behind him, crossed the dirty yard, and, producing a key from his pocket, applied it to the lock of the first door he came to. An instant later, he had opened the door and entered.

An odour incredibly foul and overpowering

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greeted him, and he paused to catch his breath, as it were. Then, groping his way forward along the wall, he came to another door, which he opened. Carefully closing it behind him, he struck a match. Its glow revealed a black pit yawning before him, into which plunged a steep and narrow stair. On a ledge at the top was a candle-end, and lighting this and holding it before him, Bassett descended the stair, which creaked and groaned ominously under his weight. At the bottom he blew out his candle and placed it carefully on the lowest step.

He could hear the ripple of the river close at hand, but no other sound, for he was at the bottom of the shaft which led to the water's edge. He apparently knew the place well, for he felt his way forward until his hands touched a board partition. Upon this he rapped sharply three times and then, after an interval, a fourth.

Instantly there was a sharp click and a little door swung open, disclosing a man holding a candle above his head and peering out into the darkness — a little, shrivelled man, with livid, pock-marked face and venomous eyes.

"All right, Hummel," said Bassett, and stepped inside and drew the door shut after him.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEMESIS

THE place which Bassett had entered was a squalid little enclosure, eight or nine feet square, with the floor of the slaughter-house for a roof, rough slabs for walls, and the earth of the river bank for a floor. A rude fireplace of loose bricks had been built in one corner, the smoke from which was conducted up through a stove-pipe into the empty slaughter-house above. A little pile of coal, stolen from a near-by coalyard, occupied one corner, and a dirty bed, formed by some boards thrown across two boxes, another. Three boxes took the place of chairs and table, and another box nailed against the wall, served as a cupboard. The floor was littered with empty cans and whiskey bottles and scraps of refuse, and was slippery and slimy with dampness from the river.

Hummel placed the candle on one of the boxes and then turned to his visitor, his face more loathsome than ever. Face, hands and clothing were caked with dirt. His hands were trembling as though with palsy, and it was evident that he was on the verge of delirium tremens.

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Without waiting for him to speak, Bassett, seeing his condition at a glance, drew from his pocket one of the bottles he had just purchased, and held it out to him.

Hummel, with a low exclamation of relief and joy, seized it, knocked off the head, and snatching up a dirty tumbler, filled it from the bottle and drained the last drop. Then he set bottle and glass down beside him with a sigh of satisfaction.

"That's better," he said. "You ain't been treatin' me right, Rafe. You oughtn't to let me run out."

"Run out!" Bassett repeated. "Good Lord! I'll have to start a distillery t' keep you from runnin' out! I never see a man who could swill whiskey like you kin—a gallon a day ain't nothin'! Why, you're a reg'lar tank, with no bottom, at that!"

Hummel glared at him evilly, then poured out another glass full of the liquor and swallowed it.

"What's that to you?" he demanded. "You know what the bargain was—an' I'm ready to do my part whenever you say the word."

"An' I'm ready t' do mine," declared Bassett, and drew the other bottle from his pocket and set it on the ground. "Is that enough fer to-night?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Hummel, sullenly. "But I'm gittin' tired of settin' here in this hog-

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pen, drinkin' myself t' death. I've got some little spark of decency left in me, though you mayn't think it. Why don't we do something?"

"We'll do something to-night!" said Bassett, with sudden fury. "Where's the gang?"

"They've weakened," said Hummel, glancing sullenly at the other. "Since them fellers were crimped at Cincinnati fer that stock-yards business, they won't do nothin'."

"They won't, hey?" cried Bassett. "Then they don't git no pay. They've got all o' my money they're goin' t' git!"

"They know that!" sneered Hummel. "It wasn't so awful much, anyway. They skipped out to-night."

"Skipped out?"

"Yes — caught a freight back to Cinci."

Bassett pondered this a moment, with knitted brows.

"All right," he said, at last. "We don't need 'em. But I didn't think any friends o' yours would be so white-livered."

"They ain't white-livered, but they don't like t' git the double cross."

"Who give 'em the double cross?" demanded Bassett, threateningly. "Do you mean me?"

"Well," replied Hummel, avoiding his eye, "I ain't namin' no names. But somebody peached on them stock-yards fellers."

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"It wasn't me. Why, just because I stood up fer 'em t'-night, I got fired out o' the brotherhood by that smooth snake of a Simpson."

"Got fired out, did you?" queried Hummel, his eyes lighting with an evil glint of satisfaction. "Then the jig's up?"

"No, it ain't up — not by a good deal. Rafe Bassett has got a lot o' fight in him yet. But first I'm goin' t' git even. Is everything ready?"

"Yes — been ready fer three days."

"Kin we two carry it?"

"I kin carry it myself. It ain't heavy."

"An' you're sure it'll work?"

"I made it — an' it ain't the first I've made by a blame sight."

"All right," said Bassett, looking at his companion with something like respect. "Come on, then," and he rose and buttoned his coat.

But Hummel sat still. His eyes were burning with a strange fire, and Bassett looked at him with some uneasiness. He had never been quite sure of Hummel; he regarded him a good deal as he might have done a deadly snake which he was keeping in captivity to use against an enemy, but always with the feeling that the snake might at any time turn against himself.

"Well," he added, after a moment, "ain't you comin'?"

"Not just yet," answered Hummel, calmly. "I want t' talk t' you a little, first. Set down."

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"We'd better be gittin' along," Bassett protested, but he sat down nevertheless.

"Now," proceeded Hummel, deliberately, "you know after we pull this thing off, I'll want to git away, an' git away quick. This won't be a healthy neighbourhood fer either of us. I don't want t' have t' wait around fer you, an' mebbe miss you, at that."

"Nobody wants you to," broke in Bassett impatiently. "What is it you're drivin' at, anyway?"

"I'm drivin' at this," said Hummel. "I want my pay here an' now."

Bassett sat for a moment contemplating him with hostile eyes.

"Half now an' half afterwards," he said, at last.

"No, sir!" Hummel objected positively. "Here an' now, all of it. Else I don't go."

"But look here," Bassett protested, "suppose I do give you the money, how do I know you'll do your part?"

"Well," said Hummel, grimly, "I guess you'll have t' trust me. But don't be afeerd — I'll do it, an' do it right!"

There was nothing to do but yield — Bassett recognized that plainly enough, for Hummel, in his present mood, was not to be argued with; besides, his demand was reasonable enough. The liquor was turning him into a demon who would stop at nothing — the very thing which Bassett had counted on it doing — and he was anxious to get

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the plot under way before the inevitable reaction set in. So, reluctantly enough, for it represented the last not only of his savings but of his credit, Bassett put his hand in his pocket, drew out his wallet and slowly counted five ten-dollar bills into Hummel's outstretched hand.

"There," he said, with an oath, "I hope you're satisfied."

Hummel folded the bills up and thrust them into an inside pocket.

"I am," he said; "an' I'm ready whenever you are. But don't think I'm doin' this job fer this dirty money. I ain't. I've got t' have this t' make my getaway, but I'm doin' this t' git even with that little snake of a chief dispatcher, an' t' show these corporations that there's some people will stand up fer their rights. I'm an anarchist, I am," he continued, growing more and more excited from minute to minute. "I'm —"

But Bassett had had enough of it, and his hand closed savagely upon the other's arm.

"Cut it out!" he cried. "Don't waste time in poppin' off — do somethin'. Where's the stuff?"

"Here it is," said Hummel, and sprang toward the pile of coal in one corner. Clearing it away, he brought to light a box perhaps a foot square. He snapped open the lid, and took out a small tube about nine inches in length. "That's a little one fer me, in case I need it," he said, his eyes gleam-

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ing, and thrust it into his pocket. "They'll never take me alive."

"See here, Hummel," protested Bassett, his face considerably paler than usual, "don't you do nothin' foolish. That's dangerous stuff to have around you."

"Oh, I know how t' handle it! Better take a drink t' keep up your nerve — you'll need it!"

Bassett, whose hands were shaking slightly, silently acknowledged the wisdom of the advice and poured himself out a drink. Hummel waited till he had finished, then poured the remainder of the contents of the bottle into the glass, and drained it, throwing the empty bottle to join the others on the floor.

"You go ahead," he said, "an' wait fer me under the lower end of the freight platform. I'll bring the stuff. We mustn't be seen together."

"All right," Bassett assented, glad to get away from his dangerous neighbourhood, and he went out, closing the door after him.

Hummel picked up the full bottle of whiskey, and getting out a knife which had a corkscrew attachment, drew the cork. Then he replaced it lightly and put the bottle in his pocket.

"I'll need that," he said to himself, and then, blowing out the candle, he left the room and groped his way up the stairs and out of the slaughter-house, the mysterious box under his arm.

He chose an alley which led away from the track,

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and then another which crossed it at right angles, and at the end of five minutes came out opposite the freight-house. He had met no one, for the night was dark and windy, with a dash of rain now and then. He stood peering across the street at the freight-house, until he saw a guard pass the circle of light at the door and disappear around the corner of the building. Then, tucking the box more firmly under his arm, he crossed the street like a shadow and disappeared beneath the platform. He worked his way along to the end of it, and nearly fell over Bassett, who was sitting under the platform there awaiting him.

"For God's sake, man, be careful!" Bassett whispered hoarsely, a cold sweat breaking out upon him at thought of what would happen if Hummel fell.

"Oh, I'm all right," retorted Hummel, easily, and sat down beside the other, placing the box beside him. "Suppose I just drop this little feller right here," he went on, pensively, taking the small tube from his pocket. "That'll set off the big one, too, an' I reckon there'd be considerable of a hole, without so much as a grease-spot left of you an' me. What d' you say to a jump into the next world, Rafe? We ain't been much of a success in this one!"

"Now, see here, Hummel," protested Bassett, savagely, the cold chills chasing each other up and down his spine, for he was not sure but that Hum-

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mel, in his desperate mood, was capable of carrying out his threat, "drop that nonsense. I've paid you t' do certain work, an' you're goin' t' do it!"

"All right," agreed the other, shortly. "I'll plant the mine —"

He ceased abruptly as he heard the guard's footsteps on the platform overhead; but the sound passed without pausing.

"I've got a fuse that burns fifteen minutes — plenty of time for a getaway. Good-bye, if I don't see you again."

"Good-bye," answered Bassett. "But I'll see you again all right."

He listened while the other worked his way forward under the platform toward the freight-shed, and then, when the sound had died away, he stuck his head out from under the platform and looked around. The wind had risen and was singing through the wires overhead.

"What a night fer a fire!" he muttered. "I've got time — fifteen minutes, anyway — I'll make a try fer it!"

A string of freight cars was drawn up beside the platform, and Bassett, crawling cautiously forth, peered into them, one after another. Some were empty, some were half-loaded, some were sealed ready to be sent east or west. Once he heard footsteps approaching and skulked beneath a car until they passed. Then he continued his quest, and at

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last, with a chuckle of satisfaction, found what he was looking for, yet scarcely expected to find — a car half-filled with barrels of oil. Evidently the work of unloading had been uncompleted at night-fall and the car had been left with the door only half-closed.

After a moment's pause, to make certain that he was not observed, Bassett drew himself up into the car, then, grasping the edge of the door, he pulled it shut. Secure from observation, he struck a match, and, shading it with his hand, looked around. The barrels had been removed from the middle of the car, but were still stacked at each end. They were dripping with oil and little puddles stood upon the floor. Evidently the touch of a match would set the whole car aflame, and would start a fire which no water would extinguish. There were cars to right and left — and with that wind! He chuckled again as he thought of the result. He would show them whether Rafe Bassett was to be treated like a dog — insulted, kicked out —

He carefully extinguished the match, and then, after a moment's thought, drew a newspaper from his pocket, and, unfolding it, twisted it into a long fuse. Then, lighting another match, he dabbled one end of the paper in a puddle of oil and pressed it down with his foot until it was sticking to the floor of the car. So intent was he on this that he failed to note that the match had burnt down to

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his fingers, and as the flame touched him, he involuntarily dropped it.

Instantly there was a flash and a roar and the whole car seemed to burst into flame. Shielding his face with one arm, Bassett sprang to the door and tried to push it back, but he jammed it in his haste and could not move it. He saw his trousers afire and stopped to beat out the flame; his trousers caught again — his coat — his hat — his hair —

Then he understood, and with a shrill scream of terror turned again to the door, clawing at it, scratching at it, tearing at it like a wild beast. Another moment, and the flames were swirling about him — another moment and he could feel his flesh crisping under their white-hot touch; another moment — and the door rolled back and he fell forward out of the car, afire from head to foot.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BOMB

THE watchman in the upper yards, passing wearily on his rounds at eleven o'clock of that windy February night, and deeply thankful that his trick would end in half an hour, stopped suddenly, ears a-strain, fancying that he had heard, above the shrieking of the wind, the shrieking of a human voice coming from the string of cars which stretched down into the lower yards. Then, deciding that it was only the wind, after all, he started on his way again, only to be startled by another scream there was no mistaking — a scream shrill, agonized, telling of the last extremity of suffering and terror.

Drawing his revolver, he started toward the cars as fast as his legs would carry him. As he drew nearer, the screams increased in shrillness and agony, and it required no little will-power on the part of the watchman to keep his legs moving in the right direction. The thought flashed through his brain that a man was being slowly torn to pieces by some ferocious wild beast, but just as he turned

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the end of the row of cars, he saw a sudden burst of flame from one of them, and a blazing figure pitched out headlong to the ground,—a figure which, with a sudden sense of sickness, the watchman recognized as a human being.

Blowing a shrill blast on his whistle, and pulling off his overcoat as he ran, he hastened forward. In a moment he was beside the moaning, struggling, blackened figure, and threw his overcoat over it, his heart faint within him, smothering the flames and beating at them with his gloves. Another watchman, summoned by the whistle, ran up at that moment.

“What’s the trouble?”

“Man burned t’ death,” panted the other.

“Who is he?”

“I don’t know; but he’s done for, whoever he is. You ought to heard him screamin’!”

They worked together feverishly for a moment longer, and beat out the last of the flames, but it was evident that the unfortunate man at their feet was far past human aid. He was still moaning and jerking convulsively, but was mercifully unconscious and would no doubt remain so to the end.

“We’ve got t’ git away from here, an’ that mighty quick,” said one of the men, with a glance at the seething inferno beside them. “That car’s loaded with oil, an’ it’s goin’ to blow up in about a minute.”

“How’re we goin’ to carry him?”

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"Roll him on my overcoat — we can carry him that way."

"I don't want to touch him," faltered the other. "He — he comes off on your fingers."

But the first watchman, with an exclamation of impatience, spread his overcoat beside the blackened body and rolled it over with his foot.

"Now, take a hold of that end," he said, "an' git a move on."

They gathered up the burden gingerly, and started away at a trot — not a moment too soon, for they had gone scarcely a hundred feet, when the car exploded with a mighty roar. Blazing oil was hurled over everything in the neighbourhood, and instantly a dozen cars were afire — the flames roaring and crackling furiously before the wind.

Stanley, awakened by the arrival of a crew from an incoming train and the departure of another to take its place, lay for a while looking down the room and watching the new arrivals prepare for bed. He was a restless man and light sleeper at the best, and he devoutly hoped that the strike was nearing an end. The strain was beginning to tell on his nerves, never any too steady, and he longed for his comfortable and quiet bed. The air in the freight-house had become fetid from the exhalations of fifty men, not over dainty in their personal habits, and with a sudden sense of disgust, Stanley threw back the covers and sat up in bed.

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As he did so, it seemed to him that he heard a faint knocking at the wall underneath him. He listened a moment, but it was not repeated, and he decided it was merely the vibration from a passing engine. But he was burdened with a queer feeling of suffocation, and slipping into his clothes, he went out to the platform for a breath of fresh air.

He was worried. He knew, somehow, that, during his absence in pursuit and prosecution of the robbers, he had lost his grip of the situation.

It had got, in some subtle way, beyond his control, and he felt the necessity of being "on the job" at every hour of the day and night. It was as though he were shadowed by some impending calamity, which he could not avoid.

He heard steps approaching along the platform and in a moment the freight-house watchman emerged from the darkness.

"Everything quiet?" Stanley asked.

"Everything but the wind," answered the watchman, laughing at his own joke, and passed on his way.

"Blamed fool!" Stanley muttered to himself, for the jest and the laugh jarred on him. "I'm gettin' as nervous as a cat," he added, and walked slowly down the platform, trying to shake off the feeling of depression.

Another thing disturbed him. The tough-looking strangers whom he had observed loitering about

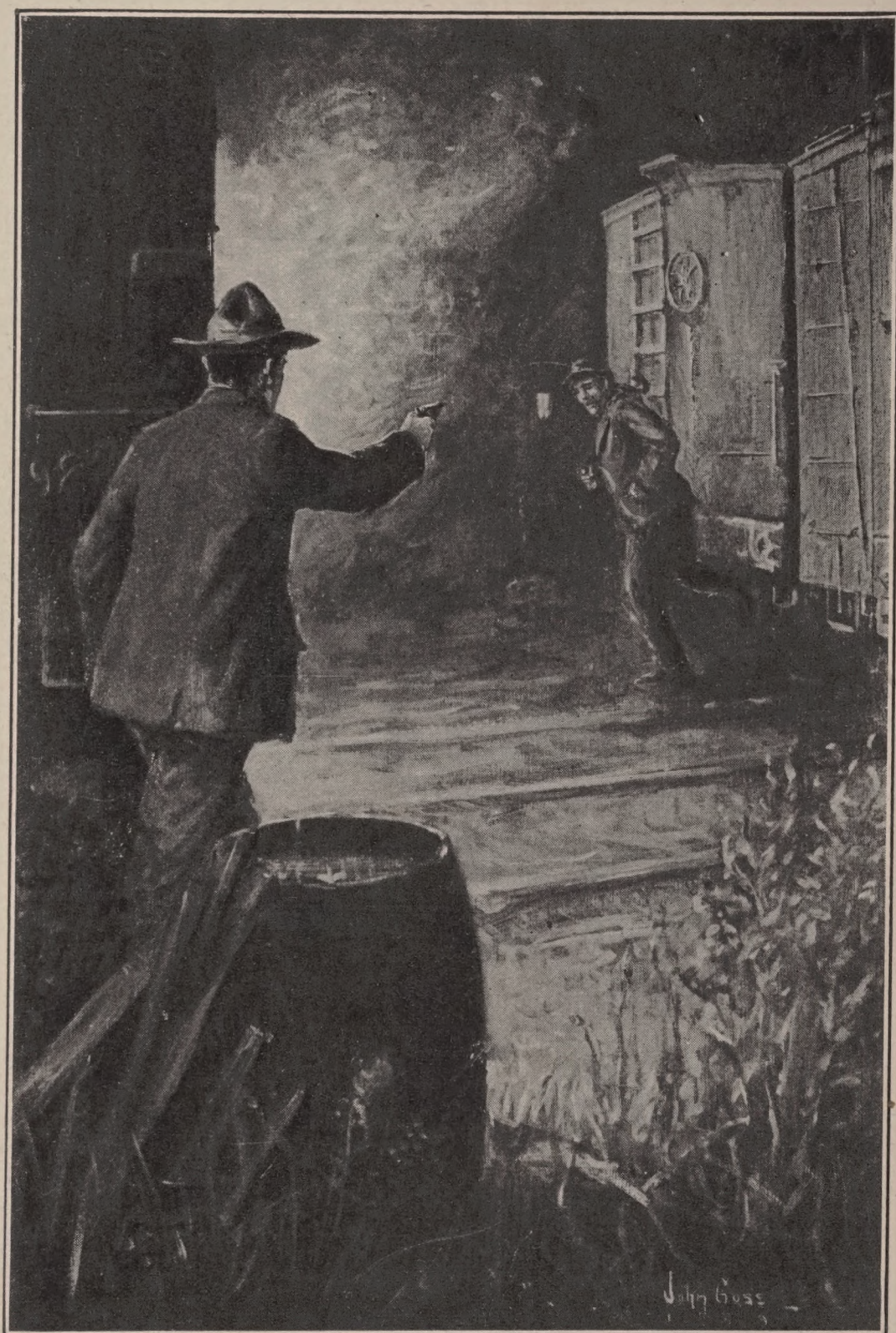
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the depot-saloons for several days past, had suddenly disappeared. He had made discreet inquiries, but no one seemed to know who they were or what had become of them. Where had they gone, he asked himself; where were they at this moment? He had heard some vague rumours of the row at the brotherhood meeting, and he could imagine Bassett's rage and chagrin. He had always connected the strangers with Bassett, in some indefinite way, and a little shiver shook him at the thought that perhaps Bassett had taken them with him to execute some fiendish project. Perhaps —

The piercing note of a watchman's whistle shrilled through the night, and Stanley, waking from this reverie with a start, saw a sudden burst of flame from the cars just before him, and realized that the crisis he had vaguely expected was at hand. And the realization made his nerves taut and his head clear. Not even his worst enemies had ever accused Stanley of cowardice in the face of danger.

"Call the fire department and the police and get out all our men!" he shouted to the freight-house watchman, who had just come into view again, and started with a jump toward the fire, which was growing brighter every instant.

But suddenly he checked himself and swerved in his course, for from beneath the platform almost at his feet, he saw a dim form emerge and slink away through the darkness.



"HE HEARD THE BULLETS SING PAST HIS HEAD."

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Stanley was off the platform and after him in an instant.

"Halt!" he shouted, drawing his revolver.
"Halt, or I fire!"

And, as if in answer, phitt! phitt! came two flashes of flame out of the darkness ahead, and he heard the bullets sing past his head.

"Take it, then!" he said, between his teeth, and fired at the legs of the figure ahead.

The figure ran on, and Stanley raised his hand to fire again; but in a moment he saw that this would not be necessary, for the fugitive was no match for him in speed and he gained upon him rapidly. Apparently, the stranger perceived the folly of flight, at last, for he stopped, one hand against his side, and waited for his pursuer to overtake him. He had not long to wait, for in an instant Stanley's heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Drop that revolver!" said the detective, and knocked it with a quick blow from his prisoner's hand.

"Oh, it's jammed," said the other, with a little bitter laugh. "If it hadn't been fer that, I'd 'a' got you!"

"What's your game?" Stanley demanded, and swung his prisoner around so that he could see his face. "Why," he cried, chuckling with satisfaction, "if it ain't our old friend Hummel! This certainly is a pleasant meeting. Welcome to our city!"

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Hummel's face was livid and his blackened and swollen lips were drawn away from his teeth in an ugly snarl.

"Don't be too gay!" he said, thickly. "Don't be too gay! Mebbe you'll be laughin' on the other side of your face afore long!"

"Well, one couldn't tell which side you're laughin' on," retorted Stanley, "fer the dirt. Been livin' with your friends the hogs?"

"Never you mind!" said Hummel, still more thickly, and reeled a little and put his hands to his head. "Never you mind!"

"Why, I believe the man's drunk!" said Stanley. "Come on back with me, my friend, an' I'll send you up-town in style, behind two horses, with a gong ringin' in front. Come on," and he started to lead his prisoner back toward the freight-house.

But Hummel developed a sudden limpness and sat down suddenly upon the pavement.

"What d' you want me fer?" he demanded, sullenly.

Stanley waved his hand toward the growing conflagration, which, at that instant, burst, with a mighty report, into a fountain of flame.

"For that," he said, sternly. "Come along, or I'll find a way to make you!"

"I didn't do that," protested Hummel, staring toward the fire, as though conscious of it for the first time. "That must 'a' been —"

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"Who?" asked Stanley, as Hummel suddenly checked himself.

"No matter," answered that worthy.

Stanley, his patience exhausted, jerked the little man to his feet and struck him over the head with his revolver.

"Come on," he said savagely, "I ain't got no time to waste on you! Step lively, or I'll put you to sleep."

Away in the distance, he could hear the growing rattle of the engine gongs and knew, with a breath of relief, that the fire department was at hand. He knew something else, too — that within a very few minutes, a great mob would be upon the scene, which it would take the hardest kind of work to control. The windows in the neighbourhood had been thrown up at sound of the explosion — he could hear the hum of voices, the cries of alarm. He had no time to fool with a reluctant prisoner, and he jerked him again to his feet.

"Will you come?" he demanded.

"No," answered Hummel, his face yellow with terror, struggling desperately to free himself.

Then Stanley lost his temper and raised his arm to strike.

But even as he did so, a mighty roar seemed to rend the firmament above him, the earth rocked, and a blinding flame leapt upwards towards the heavens. There was an instant's appalling silence, and then

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came the sound of crashing walls, the rending of timbers — and again all was still.

Only for a breath — then the night was filled with yells and groans and curses. And the whole neighbourhood, wakened by the roar, leaped from bed and rushed out into the streets, white-lipped and trembling.

Allan West, having slept the greater part of the day and evening, found himself restless and wakeful as the night progressed, and at last lay staring up into the darkness above him, meditating with smiling lips, on the events of the day. That this great happiness should have come to him seemed almost past believing — he had done so little to deserve it, had escaped so narrowly a nearly fatal blunder.

He cast his mind back over the years he had spent with the Welshes, remembering how he had seen Mamie grow from a child of eight, through all the stages of girlhood, to the radiant young womanhood she had attained; he had seen her sweetness of disposition tested scores of times; he knew how true and honest and loving she was, and he could not but wonder at his own blindness, at his tardy awakening to his love for her. Most wonderful of all it seemed that she should care for him, that she —

The window rattled suddenly and sharply, the house seemed to quiver, as though struck by some

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giant hand, and almost instantly there came a deep, jarring roar. A moment later, Allan heard the distant ringing of the fire alarm, heard excited footsteps along the street, and groped blindly along the floor for the board to which his instrument was attached.

He found it at last, seized it, pulled it up, and began calling the dispatchers' office. Fully a minute passed before the answer came, and he knew that the dispatcher had not been at his key.

"This is West," he clicked. "Any trouble up there?"

"Trouble!" flashed back the answer, in a staccato which told how excited the sender was. "I should say so! All the cars in the yards are afire and the freight-house is blown up!"

Allan gently replaced the instrument on the floor and slid out of bed. He groped his way to the closet, got out his clothes and slipped into them as quietly as he could. Shirt and coat gave him some trouble, but he managed to get them on, gritting his teeth at the pain the movement cost him. Then, without collar or tie, which he knew were beyond him, even if he had cared to linger for such trifles, he took his shoes in his hand, opened his door softly, and started down the stairs, hoping that he might get away unseen.

But before he was half way down, he heard light steps behind him and a low voice.

"Allan!" it called.

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He turned as Mamie came flying down to him, visible only as a dim shape in the darkness.

"You're not going out!" she protested, her hands upon his shoulders.

"I must," he said, bending and kissing her. "The strikers have fired the yards and blown up the freight-house. I've got to go."

"But you're not able!"

"Oh, yes, I am," he contradicted lightly, but he was grateful for the darkness which hid his face from her anxious eyes.

"And there'll probably be more trouble."

"All the more reason I should be there. You wouldn't have me be a coward, Mamie!"

It was the one appeal to touch her, and he knew it.

"No," she said, "I wouldn't have you be a coward. Go if you must; but, oh, Allan dear, be careful of yourself for my sake!"

"I will," he promised and kissed her again, as she went with him down the stairs. "I've got to put on my shoes," he added. "I thought maybe I could get away and be back and in bed again without anyone knowing."

"Let me put them on," she said quickly. "You can never manage it. You know, in the old days, the ladies used to buckle on the armour of their knights," and she took the shoes from him, pressed him into a chair and knelt before him.

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“I’m sure no knight ever had a fairer lady,”
and he caressed her hair with tender hand.

He could feel the head lift proudly.

“Nor any lady a braver knight,” she said.

“‘I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more!’”

Allan hummed. “But what an imagination you’ve got, Mamie!”

“Yes — you know I’m Irish.”

“And what a warm, loyal heart!”

“That’s Irish, too, isn’t it? And there the armour’s on!” she added, rising. “And now your overcoat, for it’s bitter cold, and this muffler around your neck,” and she tucked the ends in under his coat. “There,” she concluded, buttoning the last button, and raised herself on tip-toe and kissed him. “Good-bye, Allan, and come back to me.”

“Good-bye, Mamie; never fear,” and he was off and away.

And Mamie, drawing closer about her the shawl she had thrown on when she slipped out of bed, hurried up the stairs and knocked at the door of the room where her parents slept. It was in the back wing of the house, farthest from the street, which accounted for the fact that they had not been awakened by the hurrying feet and excited talk of the ever-increasing crowd running toward the fire. But Mamie’s knock awakened Mary on the instant.

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"What is it?" she called.

"It's Mamie — the strikers have set the yards on fire and blown up the freight-house — and Allan's gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Mary, and sprang out of bed. "Jack!" she cried. "Wake up!" and she repeated to him what Mamie had just told her.

Jack, with never a word, was out of bed and into his clothes, while his wife, with trembling fingers, lighted a lamp and opened the door for Mamie.

"How do you know he's gone?" demanded Mary. "Did you see him?"

"Yes," said the girl, her white face and trembling lips telling of her struggle for self-control.

"And you let him go?"

"He had to go — it was his place to go."

"She's right, mother," broke in Jack. "He had to go. I'm proud of the boy. An' I'll see no harm comes to him."

"Thank you, dad," said Mamie, simply, and kissed him. "You'll telephone as soon as the danger's over?"

"Yes," Jack promised; "an' don't be worried."

They heard the front door slam after him, and the house was still.

"I'm going to get dressed," said Mamie; "then — then if anything happens, we'll be ready."

She stole away to her room, but she did not proceed immediately to dress. Instead, she slipped down beside her bed and threw her arms forward

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across it and buried her face in them — and when, five minutes later, she arose, it was with a countenance pale, indeed, but serene and almost smiling.

She found her mother awaiting her in the dining-room, and they sat down together and — waited. There is no harder task, and as the weary minutes dragged along, they dared not look at each other, lest their self-control slip from them. So half an hour passed, until Mrs. Welsh could stand it no longer.

“I’m going to git some news,” she said, and went to the telephone, but central could tell her little more than she already knew, for everything was confusion as yet at the scene of the outrage. The dispatchers’ office was busy and refused to answer any call. So Mary hung up the receiver again and came back to Mamie. “I’ll try again after a while,” she said, and again they nerved themselves to wait.

But not for long.

For suddenly, the telephone rang sharply.

“I’ll go,” said Mary, and Mamie sat where she was, clutching blindly at her chair, biting her lips until the blood came.

“He’s not hurt!” she said, over and over to herself. “He’s not hurt! He’s not hurt! It can’t be! It sha’n’t be! He’s not hurt!”

“Is that you, Mary?” asked Jack’s voice.

“Yes; what’s the matter? — your voice don’t sound natural.”

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"The boy's hurted," said Jack, his voice breaking in a sob. "Bring Mamie an' come quick."

"Where to?"

"To Chestnut's drug-store. I can't tell you, Mary, but fer God's sake, come quick!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

HUMMEL KEEPS HIS WORD

ALLAN, as he turned into the street before the house, was caught by a fierce gust of wind, whirled against a tree at the edge of the pavement, and would have fallen, had not a strong arm grasped him about the waist.

"Sure, an' 'tis a reg'lar hurricane," shouted a well-known voice, and Allan found himself gazing into the cheerful face of Reddy Magraw.

"Why, Reddy," he cried, "what are you doing here?"

"I was sent after you," Reddy explained, "an' it was well I was — ye niver could have got up there by yerself."

"Nonsense!" Allan protested. "I'm nearly as strong as I ever was. That gust caught me unprepared, that's all. Come on." He didn't ask who it was had sent Reddy, but supposed of course it was Stanley.

"I'll jest hold on to yer arm, anyways," said Reddy. "Is this the well one?"

"Yes; hold on to it, if you want to; maybe

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it'll keep you from being blown away;" but to himself Allan was forced to confess more than once that Reddy's arm was a welcome support. For he was weaker than he had thought — weaker than he was willing to acknowledge, even to himself.

As for Reddy, he judged it best to say nothing as to how he had come to be appointed Allan's body-guard. He had been routed out of bed by Mrs. Magraw at the first explosion. Across the yards from their front window they could see the flames spreading, and Reddy jumped into his clothes in a hurry.

"Now listen to me," his wife had said, as this process was in progress, "there's jist one thing fer ye t' do this night, Reddy Magraw, an' that is t' kape yerself glued t' Allan West an' t' see the boy don't come t' no harm. They'll be gittin' him out o' bed the first thing, an' him scarce able t' stand! Reddy Magraw, if any harm comes t' him this night, I'll niver fegive ye!"

"Don't ye fear, darlint," Reddy assured her. "I'll stick t' him like beeswax," and, giving her a quick hug, he ran from the house and down the path to the gate.

Mrs. Magraw opened her lips to call to him; but closed them again by a mighty effort, and stood watching his dim figure until it vanished in the darkness. Then, drawing a chair close to the front window, she sat down and watched the flames grow

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and spread. Her face was very pale, and her lips moved mechanically as she told over and over again the beads of her rosary.

"There's the very divil t' pay," Reddy went on, as he and Allan hurried forward. "I didn't stop t' see much of it, but I saw enough."

As a matter of fact, he hadn't stopped at all, but had made a bee-line for Allan's gate, fearing that he would miss him.

"You kin see the fire now," he added, a moment later, and Allan, looking up, saw ahead of him a red glow against the sky, which spread and brightened, even as he watched it.

All about them were people hastening in the same direction, and as they neared the yards, they could hear the excited shouts of the crowd already assembled, the clanging of the fire-engines, and finally, just as they arrived, the swish and hiss of water as it was turned on the flames.

But Allan paused for only a glance at the fire, serious as it appeared to be. Mere property loss, however heavy, was a little thing in comparison with the possible loss of life which the wrecking of the freight-house involved, and he pushed his way forward through the crowd, anxious to learn the worst at once. The town's limited police force was already on the scene, but the crowd was entirely beyond its control, and the most it could accomplish was to keep clear a space on the freight platform

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where two physicians were already busily at work, by the light of an engine headlight.

Toward these, Allan made his way with a curious sinking of the heart. The policemen recognized him and passed him through, and at that moment, one of the doctors rose with a little gesture of despair.

"We can't do anything for him," he said. "The poor devil's about out of his misery."

Allan, staring down at the blackened shape upon the platform, scarcely recognized in it a human being.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"I don't know him," said the doctor, looking up and recognizing the chief dispatcher. "Maybe you do," and he knelt down again and turned the distorted and blackened countenance so that the light shone full upon it.

At the first sickened glance, Allan decided that he had never seen the man, then a certain familiarity struck through to his consciousness.

"Why, it's Rafe Bassett!" he cried.

"Rafe Bassett!" echoed a voice, and Allan turned to find that Stanley had broken a way through the crowd. "Well, that's justice for you!"

"Justice?" echoed Allan.

"It was him did all that," said Stanley, with a wave of the hand toward the burning cars. "Set fire to them an' got burned up hisself!"

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The crowd pressing upon the policemen heard the words and a low angry murmur ran through it, for with that blackened shape before them, the detective's words sounded particularly heartless.

"Men," cried Stanley, facing them, "this ain't no guesswork. Rafe Bassett was kicked out of the brotherhood t'-night, an' decided t' git even this way. He set that car of oil on fire — *but he was inside the car* — an' before he could git the door open, this is what happened to him. I pity the poor devil as much as any of you — an' yet I say 'twas justice."

"He's right," nodded a man at the front of the crowd. "He's right. Let's have no trouble here, men."

Allan looked down again at the dim and shapeless mass.

"Is there an ambulance?" he asked.

"Yes," answered one of the doctors. "Two of them."

"Take him away, then; and see that he is cared for. After all, he's dead, Stanley."

"An' a blamed good thing, too," muttered Stanley, whose stock of sentiment was very small; but he took care that the crowd did not hear the words. After all, there was no use in provoking trouble.

"And how about the others?" asked Allan.

"What others?"

"The men in the freight-house."

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"Oh," answered Stanley, with a grin, "they was more scared than hurt."

Allan drew a quick breath of relief.

"But didn't the bomb wreck the place?" he asked.

"Oh, it wrecked it all right; at least this end of it; but by good luck, it blew the end wall out, instead of in, and the roof didn't fall until everybody had scrambled out. I thought there'd been at least a dozen killed by the way they hollered after the bomb went off, but nobody was hurt beyond some cuts and bruises."

"Well, that was good luck!" said Allan. "That takes the biggest kind of a load off my heart."

"Yes; and the best luck of all," added Stanley dryly, "is that I caught the man who did it."

"The man who did it?" Allan stopped short in amazement to look at his companion. "Do you mean it, Stanley?"

"Mean it? I should say I did. It was the merest luck—I fell right on to him as he was gettin' away, and when I started to take him back to the freight-house he was scared to death—but he don't deny it, fer that matter."

"Who was it?" asked Allan. "One of the strikers?"

"No," said Stanley, grinning again. "One of the strike-breakers."

Again Allan stopped to gaze in amazement at his companion.

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"Hummel," explained Stanley, his face fairly glowing with satisfaction. "Oh, this has been a great night."

"Where is he now?"

"I've got him under guard in the freight office — I'll send him up to the county jail pretty soon — but he said he wanted to see you first."

"To see me? What for?"

"I don't know. Maybe he wants to confess and tell who his pals were. Of course we know Bassett was. I've got a sort of idea that Bassett was at the head of the whole thing. There's the freight-house. You kin see what damage the bomb did."

It was certainly a frightful looking place. The end wall of the building had been blown out bodily, and a great section of the platform had also been blown away. Evidently Hummel had placed the bomb just inside the wall. There was, at either end of the building, a small square ventilator near the ground, covered with a piece of perforated iron, as such openings usually are. Later investigation showed that Hummel had probably knocked out this plate, and as the ventilator was too small to permit the passage of his body, he had placed the bomb as far inside as he could reach, and had then attached and lighted the fuse. The position of the bomb, by a fortunate chance, was such that the greatest force of the explosion was directed outwards, and while the end wall had fallen, it had

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fallen outward and not inward, and the side walls had remained nearly intact. The roof had sagged badly, but had not fallen. The other end of the freight-house, at which were the offices, had not been injured at all.

Allan stood for a moment contemplating this wreckage, and as he turned away, he felt a touch on his arm. He turned to find himself face to face with Simpson, the special delegate.

"Mr. West," said Simpson, "I hope I may have a few words with you."

"Why, certainly," said Allan. "What is it?"

"In the first place, I want to assure you that no brotherhood man had anything to do with this," and he waved his hand toward the wrecked freight-house and the blazing cars.

"We know who did both," said Allan quietly. "The man who set fire to the cars was a union man."

"Who was it?" asked Simpson quickly.

"Rafe Bassett."

Simpson's face grew a shade paler, and his eyes lighted with a grim satisfaction, as he realized how this discovery vindicated the course he had taken with regard to the strike.

"Bassett was not a union man; he was suspended from the lodge last night," he said, quietly. "He would never have been reinstated. I suspect him of having had something to do with that outrage at Cincinnati, and I believe all this was done

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simply to revenge himself on the brotherhood and give it a black eye."

"And you were going to carry on the strike for a man like that?"

"No, Mr. West, we were not," answered Simpson earnestly. "After Bassett was run out of the hall last night, a committee was appointed to wait upon you in the morning and declare the strike off."

Allan's face brightened wonderfully.

"Without condition?" he asked.

"With only one condition — that the men be reinstated in their old positions — all except Bassett."

"We have promised to give permanent positions to any of the new men who made good," said Allan. "We must keep that promise."

"We have no objection to that. Mighty few of them can hold a permanent job. Mr. West, I'm going to be candid with you. This strike was begun foolishly and without proper investigation. You know why — it was because of your exposure of Nixon. Now we are anxious to make such amends as we can, and we go further than we usually do. We agree, as I have said, to your giving permanent places to as many of the strike-breakers as you care to keep and as care to stay."

Allan held out his hand quickly.

"Then I understand the strike is ended?"

"It will end at noon, if you say so."

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"I do say so."

"Good!" cried Simpson, and grasped the hand held out to him.

Not more than half a dozen men were within hearing, but the news of the great event passed like lightning from mouth to mouth, and the crowd was soon cheering like mad.

"Well," said Stanley, "I guess my job's done. I'll be mighty glad t' git back t' my bed ag'in. Will you see Hummel before I send him uptown?"

"Yes; only I've got two or three things to do first. Let's have a look at the fire."

They started together toward the lower yards, and Stanley, after glancing back once or twice, leaned over and spoke in a carefully repressed undertone.

"There's a tough-lookin' feller been follerin' you around all night," he said. "He's right behind us now. Glance around kind of careless-like an' see if you know him."

Allan glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, and then laughed outright as he recognized his faithful body-guard.

"Why, that's Reddy Magraw," he said. "He thinks I'm going to keel over any minute, and he's ready to catch me when I do."

"Oh," said Stanley, in a chagrined tone; "I didn't recognize him in the dark."

"Didn't you send him after me?"

"Send him? Why, no. Did he say I did?"

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"No, I don't know that he said exactly that. But if you didn't, who did? I wonder —"

But they had reached the place where the cars were blazing, and the matter was driven from Allan's mind for the time being. It was soon evident that all danger of the fire spreading further was over. The cars in the neighbourhood had been jerked away to a place of safety, and three or four lines of hose were playing upon the fire, with the result that it was soon under control. Six cars and their contents had been destroyed and twice as many more damaged to some extent, but this loss seemed trifling to Allan beside what might have been.

"Now I've got a report to make, and then I'm done," he said to Stanley. "I'll come over to the freight office just as soon as I can."

"All right, sir," said Stanley, and hurried away to provide fresh quarters for the strike-breakers. He found them fraternizing with the brotherhood men, and Simpson himself proposed a solution of the problem of lodging them.

"Why not bring them up to the lodge room?" he said. "It's plenty big enough, and each man can bring his cot with him. We'll see that breakfast is ready for them in the morning and after that, I guess they can get board around town somewhere. I hope you'll approve," he added to Stanley. "We want to show we're in earnest about this thing and that we bear no grudge against anyone."

"All right," agreed Stanley; "I don't see no ob-

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jections; though of course, I see your little game," he added, in an undertone. "These fellers'll be union men inside of a week."

Simpson made no reply, but smiled a diplomatic smile; and Stanley's prediction came true; for all of the strangers who secured permanent positions, joined the brotherhood in a very short time. It may be added, in passing, however, that not above eight or ten remained at Wadsworth. Most of them had the wanderlust in their blood; they could be contented in one place only for a very short time, and then must be moving on; while the rest were victims of an even worse disease, which converted them from men into brutes, and rendered them unfit to hold any position.

Allan, hurrying across the yards in the direction of his office, was conscious of quick steps behind him, and turned to find that Jack Welsh had joined Reddy Magraw.

"So here you are!" cried Jack. "Well, I certainly am glad to see you. And you're not hurted?"

"Hurt?" repeated Allan. "Why, no, of course not; why should I be?"

"And you're about ready to go home? The women are jest naterally worrited to death about you."

"Oh, I'm all right," Allan assured him, though he was conscious that both head and shoulder were aching numbly. "Reddy's been dogging me like

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a shadow. I'll be ready to go back before long. You've heard the news?"

"No. What?"

"The strike's off. I'm just going to wire the news to Mr. Schofield. Then I'll be ready to go home. I must be up early in the morning."

"We'll wait fer you," said Jack, and he and Reddy sat down on the bottom step of the steep flight which led to the dispatchers' office, while Allan hurried up the stairs.

It took but a moment to get Mr. Schofield on the line. He had been sent the first news of the disaster, and was anxious to know how serious it was. Allan's first words reassured him.

"Nobody hurt," Allan flashed, "and not over six cars destroyed, though some damage to others. Fire about out. Freight-house badly wrecked. Bassett set fire to cars and was burned to death. We also have fellow who set off bomb. Just saw Simpson, and arranged to have strike called off at noon to-day. No conditions. Admits that strike was mistake and says Bassett was fired from brotherhood last night. Willing to do most anything to square himself. And I guess that's all till I see you."

There was an instant's pause before Mr. Schofield answered.

"West," he began, "this is the greatest night's work you ever did. Are you able to be up?"

"I'm aching some," Allan answered, "but I'm

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going home to bed now. Everything is well in hand. I guess there's no further danger of trouble."

"Wait a minute," came the answer.

Allan waited until his instrument began again to call him.

"All right," he said.

"This is Round," chattered the instrument. "Schofield has just been telling me. I want to congratulate you — and order you to take at least a month's vacation."

"I guess I'll wait till my honeymoon," answered Allan, and laughed to himself at the thought.

"Are you engaged?"

"Yes. Tell Mr. Schofield I've taken his advice."

"When is it to be?"

"Don't know yet."

"Well, mind you ask me."

"I will."

"And here's my best wishes, my boy. Now go home and go to bed. I'll be at Wadsworth in a day or two, and will tell you then what I think about your work."

"All right; thank you. Good-bye."

Allan closed his key with a click, and as he did so, he was conscious of a throng around his desk. He looked up to see all the employees on duty and some who weren't on duty, but who had been got out of bed by the disturbance, crowding around him.

"Shake!" they said. "Of course we heard

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that," and Allan gripped one hand after another, his eyes shining.

"Thank you, boys," was all he could say. "Thank you."

He rejoined Jack and Reddy, at last, at the foot of the stairs.

"Just one more errand and then I'm ready to go home," he said.

"Seems to me they allers is one more," rejoined Jack. "What is it now?"

"The fellow who blew up the freight-house wants to see me."

"The fellow who blew up the freight-house? Have you got him?"

"Yes; Stanley nabbed him and has got him over there in the freight office. I guess he's kept it quiet for fear the fellow'd be mobbed."

"An' that's more sense than Stanley usually shows," said Reddy. "Who is the varmint?"

"His name's Hummel — you'll remember him, Jack."

"Did I iver see him?"

"He's the fellow who ran after me across the yards that night —"

"An' tried t' knife ye," added Jack, his face flushing darkly. "Bad cess to him. What's he want with ye now?"

"Stanley thinks maybe he wants to confess."

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"More likely he wants to take a shot at you. Don't you go, Allan."

"Oh, nonsense, Jack," laughed Allan. "He's under arrest. He can't harm me, even if he wants to. There he is now," he added, as a little procession emerged from the freight office.

Stanley had seen Allan coming across the tracks, and anxious to have the interview over and get his prisoner away before any hint of his identity should get about, had brought him out, surrounded by three or four officers. The crowd had melted away considerably, and what there was left of it was either watching the last embers of the fire, or inspecting the ruined freight-house. So the little group came out into the yards unnoticed, and stopped in the shadow of the building until Allan and his two friends came up.

Allan, stopping close to Hummel, saw that he was handcuffed, and therefore incapable of doing any one harm. He seemed bent and shrunk and only half-conscious, as though on the verge of collapse.

"Well, Hummel," he said, "you wanted to see me?"

Hummel lifted his eyes and stared at him coldly, for an instant, as though not recognizing him; then his eyes brightened with rage.

"Yes," he said, thickly, "I wanted t' see you. I hope you're satisfied with this night's work."

"Why, yes," said Allan with a smile. "Don't

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you think I have reason to be? Have you anything to tell me? ”

“ Yes,” said Hummel, his face growing more livid still, as he glared at the other. “ It’s this — I’ll be in hell to-night an’ so will you! ”

And he suddenly raised his handcuffed hands.

Allan was dimly conscious of a heavy form hurling itself past him, of a close grapple, of an instant’s pause broken only by oaths and hoarse shouting; he seemed to see Reddy Magraw grappling with the anarchist; then the world was blotted out in a white flash of flame.

CHAPTER XXIX

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MARY WELSH and Mamie, hurrying with anxious hearts and pallid cheeks, not daring to think of what awaited them, toward Chestnut's drugstore, in answer to Jack's summons, were met outside the little triangular frame building from which the drugstore stared out upon the tracks, by Jack himself, his face gray and lined with suffering and self-accusation.

"Wait a minute," he said, hoarsely, and Mary, reading the suffering in his eyes, put her hand quickly upon his arm.

"How is he?"

"I don't know yet. The doctor's just finishin' with him."

And then his self-control gave way, and a great sob shook him.

"A nice guardeen I am, ain't I?" he asked, bitterly. "Oh, I could go an' throw myself under the wheels of that engine there!"

"Don't, Jack!" protested Mary, quickly. "Don't take it so. Whatever happened wasn't your fault."

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"Yes, it was! I stood by like a dumb beast an' let Hummel — Kin ye ever forgive me, Mamie? Oh, but I'm shamed t' look ye in the eyes!"

"Forgive you, dad?" cried the girl, her heart smitten as she looked at him. "Why, dad, there's nothing to forgive. I know you did your best."

"Not like Reddy Magraw," said Jack, the tears streaming down his face. "Not like Reddy Magraw. Do you know what he did — he saw that varmint fumblin' at his pocket, an' he must have guessed what was comin' — I was lookin', too, but I never thought of nothin' like that — an' Reddy jumped fer him an' grabbed him — an' jest then the bomb went off —"

"He's dead, ain't he, Jack?" asked Mary.

"Yes," said Jack, with a hoarse sob, "an' so's Reddy Magraw — an' if our boy lives, it'll be because of Reddy, not because o' me. That's what it makes me sick t' think of!"

"Reddy dead!" gasped Mary, the tears starting to her eyes. "Does —"

"No," said Jack. "You'll have t' tell her. I couldn't to save my soul."

"I'll tell her," said Mary, quietly. "She'll be proud when she knows."

And then the door opened and they saw the doctor standing on the threshold.

"Come in," he said softly. "You can see him now; and it's all right."

"You mean he ain't dead?" asked Jack.

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“No, nor going to die. Is this Mamie?” he added, turning to the young woman.

“Yes,” she answered.

“He’s been asking for you. He mustn’t be excited,” he added, looking at the others. “Is it necessary that you see him?”

Mary gulped back the indignant words which rose to her lips. Necessary that she see her boy!

“No,” she said, steadily. “We’ll jest excite him. You go, Mamie. Jack’ll wait fer ye,” and she held Jack by the hand until Mamie had entered and the door had closed behind her.

“It’s her place, not mine,” she said. “An’ now I’ll go over t’ the Magraws.”

“Mary,” said Jack, hoarsely, and put his arm around her, “you’re the bravest little woman I ever knew. I’m proud of ye.”

But Mary felt anything but brave as, in the gray light of the dawn, she slowly crossed the tracks and mounted the path to the door of the little house. For, after all, what could she say to lighten the force of the blow? What could anyone say? Suppose it was some one else coming to tell her of Jack? She caught her breath sharply —

And then she was conscious that the door was open and when she looked up, she saw Mrs. Magraw standing there and gazing down at her, a strange light in her eyes.

“Come in,” she said, and led the way into the little parlour, from which, during the night, she

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had watched the flames across the yards. "I knowed ye'd come," she added. "I knowed ye'd want t' be the one t' tell me — an' I thank ye, Mary Welsh."

"You — you know?" gasped Mary, staring at her. "Somebody's told you?"

"No, nobody's told me; but I know. I knowed when I saw him goin' away that he was niver comin' back."

"An' you let him go?"

"Yes, I sent him."

"Sent him?"

"T' guard the boy? Did he guard him?"

And Mary Welsh flung herself upon her knees before the other woman and buried her face in her lap.

"He did!" she said, thickly. "With his life."

Mr. Schofield, relieved of the stress of duty at Cincinnati, arrived at Wadsworth on the early train next day, and at once took charge of the situation. There was much to do. The whole train service of the road had to be reorganized, the ravelled ends gathered up again, the freight-house rebuilt, traffic provided for; and for four days and nights he thought of nothing else. Then, the first strain past, he put on his hat one afternoon, and started back over the yards to a little house which stood high on an embankment facing them.

He climbed the steep path, and paused for a

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moment to look down over the yards before knocking at the door. His eyes gleamed with pride as he watched the busy engines, the assembled cars, the evidences of orderly and busy life.

Then he turned and knocked. An Irish woman well past middle age, and with hair snowy white, opened the door.

"Mrs. Magraw?" asked the visitor.

"Yis, sir."

"My name's Schofield."

"I know ye, sir," said Mrs. Magraw, quietly. "This ain't the first toime ye've been to see me."

"No — but that was a good many years ago. If you don't mind, I'll sit down here on the porch. I want to talk to you."

"All right, sir," said Mrs. Magraw, and tried to dust off the bench, but Mr. Schofield was too quick for her.

"I've heard how your husband died," he began gently, "and I want to say this: no man ever died a nobler death."

"I'm proud of him, sir," said Mrs. Magraw, her eyes filling with tears. "I'm prouder of him than I kin say."

"We're all proud of him. I've been proud of him for many years. It isn't the first time he's proved the stuff he was made of."

Mrs. Magraw nodded.

"But there's no use for me to tell you that," went on the superintendent. "You knew him better

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than I did. Now here's what I've come to say. The road has pensioned you for life. You will receive a check every month for thirty dollars."

"Thirty dollars!" echoed Mrs. Magraw. "Why, sir, —"

"I know it isn't very much —"

"Very much! It's all the difference between starvin' an' livin', sir."

"I'm glad of that. How old is your oldest boy?"

"Thirteen, sir."

"What do you want him to be?"

"Well, sir, he seems to have a taste fer mechanics."

"All right; there's a job waiting for him, and for all the other boys when they're old enough. The road wants to make life just as easy for you as it can, Mrs. Magraw; and even at that, it feels that it has done mighty little — so little that I was almost ashamed to come here to-day and tell you. It's not in any sense intended as a recompense — don't think it."

"I understand, sir," said Mrs. Magraw, and there was in her face a sweet dignity. "An' I've had my recompense — with the flowers an' the men at the funeral — the shop-men, sir, an' the brotherhood — stretchin' clear out t' the street yonder, an' cryin', sir, as if 'twas their own brother —"

She stopped, her eyes gleaming.

"He was the brother of every one of us," he

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said; and added, soberly, "I wish I was as good a man!"

Mrs. Magraw watched him as he crossed the yards; watched him till a corner of the round-house hid him from view; then she turned slowly back into the house, her face shining.

"Oh, Reddy," she said hoarsely to herself; "it's a proud woman I am this day; proud fer ye — proud fer ye — oh, an' heart-broken, too."

The next afternoon, Mr. Schofield called up Jack Welsh's residence.

"How's Allan getting along?" he asked of the woman's voice which answered the phone.

"He's gittin' along as well as could be expected."

"Is he able to sit up?"

"Yes, sir; he sets up a little every day."

"This is Schofield talking. I wonder if I could see him this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; I guess so," answered the voice, but without enthusiasm.

"Well, tell him I'll be down in about an hour — and if he can't see me yet awhile, let me know."

"All right, sir."

"It's Mister Schofield wantin' to see you," Mary announced to Allan, three minutes later. "Says he'll be here in an hour. Hadn't I better tell him you ain't able?"

"Oh, I guess I'm able," said Allan, smiling up at her.

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He was lying back in a great chair, with Mamie beside him.

"Well, it's time he was askin' after ye."

"He's been pretty busy, I suspect."

Mary snorted.

"A good excuse! An' I know what he's comin' fer."

"What?" asked Allan, smiling broadly.

"He'll be wantin' to know when you're comin' back to work."

"And I'll tell him Monday."

"Monday, indeed," cried Mary and Mamie both.

"Why, I'm all right again," Allan protested.

"A little shaky and scary, but I'll get over that."

"Well, we'll see about it," said Mamie, in a tone which told that she was far from being convinced.

Mrs. Welsh went about her household work, leaving the two together, and presently there came the expected knock at the door.

But when she opened it, it was not Mr. Schofield alone who stood there. With him was a man with blue eyes and light hair and flowing blonde moustache whom Mrs. Welsh had never seen before.

"How do you do, Mrs. Welsh," said Mr. Schofield, shaking hands with her. "This is Mr. Round," he added, and Mr. Round also shook hands. "Can we see the invalid?"

"Ye-yes, sir," stammered Mary, more over-

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whelmed than she had ever been in her life. "Right up these stairs, sir."

She led the way and ushered them into Allan's room.

He started and flushed when he saw who Mr. Schofield's companion was.

"No," said Mr. Schofield, smiling at Mrs. Welsh, "I didn't come this time to ask you when you're coming back to work; but to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" echoed Allan. "You're not going away?"

"He's got too big for us," said Mr. Round. "I've been afraid of it for a long time. Let me introduce you to the new general superintendent of the Rock Island."

"What!" cried Allan, his face beaming. "Oh, but I'm glad!" and he held out his hand eagerly. "Sorry, too," he added. "You've been one of the best friends I ever had."

"And always will be," said Mr. Schofield heartily. "We're all proud of you, Allan. Let me see, how old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Rather young for train master," said Mr. Round, looking at him quizzically.

"Train master?" Allan echoed, suddenly white.

"Though we'll try you, anyway," and Mr. Round smiled broadly. "That is, if you accept."

"Why," stammered Allan, "I can't — I don't —"

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"Don't try. There's no hurry, either. You know what I said to you about a vacation?"

"Yes," said Allan.

"And you said something about a honeymoon."

Mamie flushed crimson, and even Allan reddened a little.

"Is this the young lady?" asked Mr. Round, looking at Mamie approvingly.

"Yes," said Allan. "Mamie — Miss Welsh."

"I congratulate you, my dear," said Mr. Round, shaking her kindly by the hand. "I've heard of that exploit of yours. The road is your debtor more than I can say. I hate to think what would have happened if it hadn't been for you."

"I take the credit of this match," added Mr. Schofield, laughing. "I told Allan it was the only proper thing to do."

"I'd already arrived at the same conclusion," said Allan, "and we'd just settled it when you called up."

"Well," said Mr. Round, with another glance at Mamie's rosy face, "I think you're to be congratulated too, Allan. You seem to have a knack of falling on your feet. When is it to take place?"

"Next month," answered Allan, boldly, without even glancing at Mamie.

That young lady opened her lips and stared at him in astonishment, but closed them again without speaking.

"Where are you going for the honeymoon?"

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"Oh, we haven't decided. We haven't much money to spend on a honeymoon, you know."

"Have you thought of California?"

"Of California? No, nor of the moon," answered Allan, with a laugh. "Palm Beach, maybe, if we can get transportation."

"Oh, I guess you can," said Mr. Round, with a little laugh. "But I'm sorry you hadn't thought of California. You see, when you spoke of the honeymoon, I thought a little trip through the west would be just the thing, so I pulled a few wires, and here," he put his hand in his pocket and brought out a thick envelope, "is the result. What shall I do with it?"

"What is it?" asked Allan and Mamie in the same breath.

"An order from the President to place my private car at your disposal for a month — transportation over the Southern Pacific going and the Northern Pacific returning — what do you say, children?"

What could they say!

With a chuckle of sheer enjoyment, Mr. Round tossed the envelope into Allan's lap.

"Mind you ask me to the wedding," he said, and caught up his hat. "Come on, Schofield. We're in the way."

"How do you know I'm going to marry you next month?" demanded Mamie.

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"I know you are — you can't refuse — it might send me into a decline."

"Decline, indeed," sniffed Mamie.

"I knew you wouldn't!" laughed Allan.

Mamie laughed too, and kissed him.

"Don't you feel like a fairy god-child?" she asked. "I do."

"What day is it?" he asked, suddenly.

"The fifteenth."

"Then to-morrow's Betty Heywood's wedding — and I can't be there — I haven't even sent a gift. What will she think of me?"

"Write and tell her," suggested Mamie, and Allan did — told her more, perhaps, than Mamie intended he should; and the answer came promptly two days later.

"Dear Allan," it ran, "Your letter was the dearest wedding gift of all; to know that you had found the right girl and that you are happy was just the one thing needed to give the crowning touch to my own happiness. So you see that I was right! I've never doubted it for an instant, but just the same I'm glad it's proved. I'm scribbling this at the last moment, for your letter just came; there's the wedding march — I must go. I'm very, very happy, Allan, and I suppose that this is the last time I shall ever sign myself
BETTY HEYWOOD."

Allan looked up from the letter, his eyes shining.

"She's a dear girl," he said.

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"Yes," agreed Mamie, a little doubtfully.

"But not the dearest," added Allan smiling. "Come here. Look what a beautiful sunset. Look at those crimson clouds along the horizon."

"Who is the dearest?" asked Mamie, refusing to be led aside from the question under discussion.

"Can't you guess?"

"I'm not good at guessing."

"It's the same one I jerked from in front of an engine years and years ago; the same one I used to do sums for; the same one who saved my life just the other day. Now can you guess?"

"Yes," said Mamie, dimpling and snuggling close to him; "yes, I think I can!"

And so we leave them.

What does the future hold? For one thing, be sure that it holds happiness. Be sure, too, that the young train master will not always be merely that. He can afford to wait—to grow and broaden, to learn his business thoroughly; but the time will come when he will step up and up. Yet, however high he climbs, those first years, whose history we know, will be a sweet and ever-present memory, as years of trial always are when one has emerged from them triumphant.

THE END.

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